

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
10 January 2002 (10.01.2002)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 02/03232 A2

- (51) International Patent Classification⁷: **G06F 17/00**
- (21) International Application Number: **PCT/US01/20754**
- (22) International Filing Date: **28 June 2001 (28.06.2001)**
- (25) Filing Language: **English**
- (26) Publication Language: **English**
- (30) Priority Data:
09/607,751 **30 June 2000 (30.06.2000)** **US**
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45202 (US).
- (81) Designated States (*national*): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AT (utility model), AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, CZ (utility model), DE, DE (utility model), DK, DK (utility model), DM, DZ, EC, EE, EE (utility model), ES, FI, FI (utility model), GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SK (utility model), SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZW.
- (84) Designated States (*regional*): ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).
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- Published:**
— *with declaration under Article 17(2)(a); without abstract; title not checked by the International Searching Authority*
- (74) Agents: **REED, T., David** et al.; The Procter & Gamble Company, 5299 Spring Grove Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45217-1087 (US).
- For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.*



WO 02/03232 A2

(54) Title: **METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR CREATING AND IMPROVING PRODUCTS AND SERVICES USING ELECTRONIC COLLECTION OF INFORMATION**

(57) Abstract:

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR CREATING AND IMPROVING PRODUCTS AND SERVICES USING ELECTRONIC COLLECTION OF INFORMATION

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TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates generally to collection and use of comments, such as feedback and/or ideas, from customers, and more specifically to a unique method and system for electronically and interactively collecting information relating to products or services by providing targeted questions based upon previous responses until an actionable level of detail is achieved. The invention also relates to a method and system for electronically acquiring ideas through electronic waiver of rights and consideration. The comments and other information collected can then be used to efficiently and quickly improve products and services.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Conventional methods for collecting comments, such as complaints, regarding products and services, such as from customers for example, have included providing a telephone number or e-mail address for contacting a company representative to whom the comments or complaints can be submitted. The representative can then record the comment or complaint for later use by the company.

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However, such comment collection systems often require a significant number of employees for collecting and categorizing data. Moreover, comments may only be collected during the working hours of such employees. In addition, the customer submitting the comments is not guided in the wording and detail used to describe the comment, and so the comment may not provide a level of detail which can be utilized in creating and improving the products and services at issue. Furthermore, it may take time to deliver to the customer relevant information for assistance with the problem experienced.

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Sometimes, a customer may be asked to take a survey to identify problem areas and thereby assist in prioritizing improvement activities. Such a survey is usually mailed to the customer and is often limited in the depth of questions in order to limit the length of the survey, as

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it is often difficult to persuade the customer to complete a long or complex survey. Accordingly, such a method requires the company to take the time and expense in 1) selecting people to be surveyed, 2) request the survey to be completed, 3) receive and record the data from the survey, and 4) summarize the data into a usable form.

5 In contrast to the traditional survey, a more detailed survey is needed to prioritize ways to improve product or services. For instance, if the customer problem relates to a specific component or feature of the product, a set of specific questions are needed to detail the manner in which that specific component failed. For example, an indication that a diaper had a faulty tape system does not pinpoint the problem, but only generates more questions, such as whether the
10 tapes failed to adhere, whether the tapes were missing, etc. Moreover, depending on the specific way in which that component may have failed, more specific questions apply only to that malfunction. For instance, if the tapes failed to adhere, certain specific questions are relevant with respect to the circumstances surrounding the failure, such as questions regarding how often the tapes were open/closed and whether lotion or powder were applied.

15 On the other hand, as mentioned above, customers are less apt to complete the survey if it is lengthy and time-consuming, and especially if it includes many questions not relevant to the specific problem, but which are relevant to other specific problems. Furthermore, the timing of the survey request is also important, as the details regarding the problem and the surrounding circumstances may have been forgotten if the survey is not delivered to the customer and
20 completed in a timely manner.

 Accordingly, traditional methods and systems often fail in providing meaningful feedback to the company which can be used to create and improve the product or services, and even when meaningful feedback is provided, there is a significant delay and expense in receiving the feedback and using it to implement changes.

25 Accordingly, there remains a need for a method and system for collection of specific and targeted data regarding customer comments which records the most relevant information in a more timely manner and with lower expense, and with immediate availability to a large number of company employees for use in improving/creating products or services. There also remains a need for a system to improve overall accuracy and detail in obtaining and recording comments from
30 consumers, suppliers, and other customers.

 Like manual methods for collecting product complaints and evaluations, manual methods have also been utilized to collect ideas from a customer or other business party. After contacting the company, the party is typically mailed a paper document including a waiver of rights to the idea and/or other agreement, and the idea is manually submitted by the user along with the

document. If the idea is accepted by the company, the party is then provided with some form of consideration for the idea, such as by mailing payment or other compensation to the party.

However, such a manual system requires the time, difficulty, and expense for company personnel to review the invention and to provide the compensation. The time delay in this process results in a delay in the company's potential use of the idea for improving products or services. Accordingly, there remains a need for a method and system for idea acquisition which reduces the time, difficulty, and expense in acquiring ideas, and which makes them immediately available for use and analysis by a large number of employees for product and service improvement and development.

In addition, the collection of customer complaints, the collection of customer survey results, and the collection of customer ideas have typically been managed by separate personnel, procedures, and systems. Accordingly, the data collected in these efforts have typically been separated, and accessible by only particular personnel using particular analysis tools. Such a system subsequently suffers from reduced efficiencies and limited use and distribution of the data collection. Moreover, such a separated system often fails to quickly collect detailed survey data and ideas from those who have recently experienced a problem with a product or service and who may have very relevant information and ideas related to that problem. Thus, there remains a need for an integrated method and system for collection of complaints, survey results, and ideas, which reduces inefficiencies and increases the usefulness and availability of data collected. There also remains a need for such an integrated method and system which allows customers to quickly and efficiently submit relevant and detailed survey data and ideas simultaneously with a complaint submission.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to obviate the above-described problems.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an improved method and system for collection of customer comments, feedback, and ideas.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a method and system for collection of customer comments which obtains relevant detail more quickly and easily.

Yet another object of the present invention is to provide a method and system for collection of customer comments which quickly and efficiently obtains and disseminates relevant detail regarding products or services, for use in improvements thereto.

A further object of the present invention is to provide a method and system for collection of customer comments which encourages and facilitates the submission of such comments with specific detail.

5 Another object of the present invention is to provide a method and system for collection of customer comments which requires less personnel.

Yet another object of the present invention is to provide a method and system for the acquisition of customer ideas quickly and with low expense.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a method and system for collection of customer ideas regarding products or services which requires less personnel.

10 A further object of the present invention is to provide a method and system for collection of customer ideas regarding products or services which quickly and efficiently obtains and disseminates relevant ideas regarding products or services, for use in improvements thereto.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a method and system for collection of customer ideas which provides an enforceable, legal transfer of the idea in a quick and efficient manner.

15 Another object of the present invention is to provide an integrated method and system for collecting customer complaints, survey data, and ideas in a timely and efficient manner and with an actionable level of detail.

20 Yet another object of the present invention is to provide a method and system for collecting customer complaints, survey data, and ideas and for allowing access to the collected information to a large number of employees.

To achieve the foregoing and other objectives, a method for providing customer comments regarding a product or service is provided. The method comprises displaying a page which prompts a customer to select a general problem type corresponding to a problem experienced with a product or service. The method also comprises receiving an electronic selection from a customer indicating a general problem type. In response to the general problem type selection, a page is displayed prompting the customer to input specific information regarding the general problem type. The method also includes receiving specific information inputted by the customer regarding the general problem type.

25 30 According to another aspect of the invention, a network-based method of obtaining ideas regarding products or services from a customer is provided. The method comprises the steps of receiving from a customer an initial input indicating that the customer wishes to submit an idea regarding products or services. In response to the initial input, a page is automatically and electronically displayed to the customer to indicate whether the customer wishes to surrender

rights to the idea. The method also includes receiving from the customer a waiver input indicating that rights to the idea are surrendered, and receiving inputs from the customer representing the idea. If no waiver input is received, a page is displayed to the customer indicating that the idea has not been accepted.

5 In accordance with another aspect of the invention, a system for collection and analysis of consumer comments regarding products or services is provided. The system comprises a first computer network including a plurality of customer client computers, comment collection software, and at least one data bank. The comment collection software is accessible by the customer client computers and configured for allowing the customer to input comments regarding
10 products or services. The at least one data bank stores the comments as data. In addition, the system includes a second computer network including a plurality of employee client computers and data analysis software. The data analysis software is accessible by the employee client computers for analyzing the data.

Still other objects of the present invention will become apparent to those skilled in this art
15 from the following description wherein there is shown and described preferred embodiments of this invention, including a best mode currently contemplated for carrying out the invention, simply for the purposes of illustration. As will be realized, the invention is capable of other different aspects and embodiments without departing from the scope of the invention. Accordingly, the drawings and descriptions are to be regarded as illustrative in nature and not
20 restrictive in nature.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

While the specification concludes with claims particularly pointing out and distinctly
25 claiming the invention, it is believed that the same will be better understood from the following description of preferred embodiments, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a schematic illustration of an exemplary network-based system for collection of comments and ideas regarding products or services according to principles of the present invention;

30 FIG. 2 is a block diagram of a number of linked pages which illustrate an exemplary method for collection of comments and ideas according to principles of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a flow diagram illustrating an exemplary method for collection of complaints regarding products and services according to principles of the present invention;

FIG. 4a, continuing to FIG. 4b, illustrates an exemplary page for use in collection of complaints according to the method of FIG. 3;

FIG. 5 illustrates another exemplary page for use in collection of complaints according to the method of FIG. 3;

5 FIG. 6 is a flow diagram illustrating an exemplary method for collection of ratings and comments regarding products and services according to principles of the present invention;

FIG. 7a, continuing to FIG. 7b, illustrates an exemplary page for use in collection of ratings and comments according to the method of FIG. 6;

10 FIG. 8a, continuing to FIG. 8b, illustrates an exemplary page for use in collection of ratings and comments according to the method of FIG. 6;

FIG. 9 is a flow diagram illustrating an exemplary method for collection of ideas regarding products and services according to principles of the present invention;

FIG. 10 illustrates an exemplary page for use in collection of ideas according to the method of FIG. 9;

15 FIG. 11a, continuing to FIG. 11b, illustrates an exemplary page for use in collection of ideas according to the method of FIG. 9;

FIG. 12 is a flow diagram illustrating an exemplary alternative method for collection of ideas regarding products and services according to principles of the present invention;

20 FIG. 13 illustrates an exemplary waiver of rights page for use in automatic collection of ideas according to principles of the present invention;

FIG. 14a is a perspective view of a kiosk for use in collection of ideas, complaints, and/or evaluations regarding products or services, according to one aspect of the present invention;

FIG. 14b is an exemplary page which can be displayed on the kiosk of FIG. 14a; and

25 FIG. 15 is a flow diagram illustrating an exemplary method for automatic collection and transfer of ideas, according to principles of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Turning now to the drawings in detail, wherein like numerals indicate corresponding structure throughout the views, FIG. 1 is a schematic illustration of an exemplary network-based system 19 for collection of customer comments and ideas regarding products or services according to principles of the present invention. As used herein, the term "customer" includes, for example, ultimate users of products or services, distributors and sellers of products or services, suppliers of products or services, and/or any other business party such as contract manufacturers, subsidiaries, licensees, partners, consultants, and the like. In addition, as used herein, the term

“comment” includes, for example, positive and negative feedback, complaints, problems, evaluations, information regarding a product or service, and the like. Moreover, the term “idea” as used herein includes, for example, inventions, concepts, business ideas, methods, suggestions or descriptions for changing a product or service, suggestions or descriptions for new products or services, suggestions for adding new features to a product or service, suggestions for removing features from a product or service, identification of unmet needs and desires or problem areas, and the like. The term “page”, as used herein, includes one or more electronic or computer display areas, views, websites, windows, screens, displays, webpages, frames, and the like.

Preferably, the inventive methods and systems described herein operate in a network environment, which includes a group of computing devices and/or associated hardware connected or linked together by communication, to share and transmit information, applications and/or services. In the exemplary embodiment of FIG. 1, computers 20, 22, 24 and 26 are provided in such a networked system 19. Sometimes in this setting, the various computers 20, 22, 24 and 26 are referred to as nodes, which is a generic term referring to an access point in a interconnected system. The exemplary type of computer network 19 in FIG. 1 employs a client/server architecture, wherein the portions of network applications that interact with human users are typically separated from the portions of network applications that process requests and information. In particular, the portions of an application that interact with users or access network resources are called client applications or client software and run on client machines 22, 24, and 26. Portions of an application that process requests and information are called server applications or server software and run on server machine 20, although the server 20 can act as a client as well. In this preferred embodiment of the invention, a user interface 23 is provided on a client machine 22, 24, and 26 and includes software, information, data, display items, and/or hardware which allows the user to interact with the system 19. In addition, the software containing the computer instructions which execute the methods according to the present invention are located on the server computer 20, separate from the client machine.

However, other distributions, configurations, and architectures are possible without departing from the scope of the present invention. As one with ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate, a client/server network 19 is only one type of network, and a variety of other configurations, such as peer-to-peer connections, are also considered networks. In a client/server network, the plurality of nodes are interconnected such that the various nodes electronically send and/or receive information to/from one another. As shown in FIG. 1, the server node 20 is interconnected with the plurality of client nodes 22, 24, and 26 using a connection or link 21 such as a token ring, Ethernet, telephone modem connection, radio or microwave connection, parallel

cables, serial cables, telephone lines, universal serial bus "USB", Firewire, Bluetooth, fiber optics, infrared "IR", radio frequency "RF", and the like, or combinations thereof.

5 In this system 19, at least one computer-readable medium 25 holds information readable by the server 25 and or the clients 22, 24, and 26, such as programs, data, files, etc. As will be readily appreciated, computer-readable medium can take a variety of forms, including magnetic storage (such as hard disk drives, floppy diskettes, etc.), optical storage (such as laser discs, compact discs, DVD's, etc.), electronic storage (such as random access memory "RAM", read only memory "ROM", programmable read only memory "PROM", etc.), and the like.

10 The user interface 23 presents information and questions to the user and prompts the user to enter comments, complaints, ideas, suggestions and the like in accordance with principles of the present invention as described in further detail below. In this exemplary embodiment, the user interface 23 is provided by the client computer systems 22, 24, and 26 which include a CPU, memory, a visual display device 28 and an input device 29. Input devices 29 are connected to the computers 22, 24 and 26 to allow for the input to the user interface 23 of comments, suggestions, and/or ideas regarding products or services. For example, a keyboard, mouse, microphone, or other input device could be utilized.

15 As an alternative to the computer based system of FIG. 1, the user interface 23 could reside on a kiosk, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a device with wireless application protocol programs (WAP) such as cell phone, auto computer or PDA, interactive TV, an Internet appliance, or the like. The user interface 23 allows the user to communicate and interact with the system 19 and, as will be understood, can take any of a virtually unlimited forms.

20 As an example of such an alternative, and as shown in FIG. 14a, the various methods and systems described herein can be provided to a user by a kiosk located in a store or other public location. The kiosk 500 can include a display 502 for providing information to the user and prompting the user to enter information, as well as a keyboard 504 or other input device to provide inputs or data from the user. Other devices can be provided as desired, such as a microphone 506 and camera 508 to provide audiovisual input, and a speaker 510 to provide audio output. FIG. 14b is an example of a page which may be displayed on the screen 502. In this example, the user is prompted to provide feedback regarding diapers. By selecting the link to Product A, Product B, or Product C, the user may provide comments, such as complaints or ideas, regarding a particular brand of diaper. As can be understood, other such pages can be provided to allow the user to enter comments regarding any of a variety of other products, brands, or services, such as those provided by the store or facility in which the kiosk resides.

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Returning again to FIG. 1, in this exemplary embodiment, the client computers 22, 24, and 26 are connected to the Internet through the communication link 21 and execute a web browser to allow for interaction with the system 19 and, more specifically, with web pages managed by the server 20. While the web pages are hosted on an Internet network 21 in this embodiment, other networks could be utilized such as a wide-area network, local-area network, or the like.

To provide such a web-based network environment, any of a variety of web browser technologies can be utilized, including well-known software programming languages (e.g., C, C++, Java, Active X, Active Server Pages) and Internet communication protocols (TCP/IP). Many browsers exist for accessing the World Wide Web, such as Netscape Navigator from Netscape Communications Corp. and the Internet Explorer from Microsoft Corp. Similarly, numerous web servers exist for providing content to the World Wide Web, such as Apache from the Apache Group, Internet Information Server from Microsoft Corp., Lotus Domino Go Webserver from IBM, Netscape Enterprise Server from Netscape Communications Corp. and Oracle Web Application Server from Oracle Corp. These browsers and web servers can be utilized to allow access to the various aspects of the present invention from virtually any web-accessible device.

In the exemplary embodiment of FIG. 1, and according to principles of the present invention, the server 20 executes instructions or programs stored on medium 25 in order to provide interactive collection of complaints regarding products or services, interactive collection of ratings regarding products or services, and interactive collection of ideas regarding products or service. These programs 40, 42, and 44 may be separate software modules or routines or files, or may be combined as a single software program or file. The programs 40, 42, and 44 allow the client computers 22, 24, and 26 to submit complaints, ratings, ideas or other comments at any time to the server 20, which can then store these submissions in at least one data bank 46. This data bank can then be accessed by company personnel, consultants, or other authorized parties, for immediate use in improving the products or services. Any of a variety of data analysis, data summary, statistical process analysis, and/or data mining tools and software may then be utilized to study the data collected. Such software can be run on a second network similar to that of FIG. 1. In particular, a company server can be provided, similar to the server of FIG. 1, and company clients can be connected to the server, in a manner similar to the clients of FIG. 1. Preferably, the server and clients of FIG. 1 are connected via the Internet, while the company server and company clients are connected via an Intranet, local area network, or the like. The data analysis software may then be used by the company clients to analyze the complaint, survey, and/or idea data stored in the databank. Accordingly, a large number of company employees at separate

locations may access all of the data and comments received from customers, using the company client computers and a standardized data analysis software tool. These employees may then immediately utilize the data as it is submitted by customers, for improving and creating products and services.

5 While the operation of the inventive aspects of this exemplary comment collection system and method will be described in detail below, in general, the user can connect to the system 19 by using a web browser on the user interface 23, and then access web pages managed by the server 20 by using a universal resource locator (URL) to retrieve the web pages. Typically, URL addresses are typed into or selected using an input area 30 of the browser to access the web pages.

10 In addition, URL addresses can be embedded within the pages themselves to provide hypertext links 32 to other pages. A hypertext link allows the user to click on the link and be redirected to the web site, page, display, screen, view, or other frame corresponding to the URL address of the hypertext link. Other input areas in addition to area 30 and link 32 can also be provided to allow for the input of data or other information by the user. For example dialog boxes 34 and pop-up

15 lists 36 can be utilized, as well as other selectable menus, icons, diagrams, screens, links, words, or symbols. Using the displayed items and input devices, the user can provide comments such as ratings, complaints, suggestions, survey data, ideas, inventions, and/or other data regarding products or services to the server 20, which can store the data in at least one data bank 46 for electronic retrieval by company personnel. According to principles of the present invention and

20 as described in further detail below, this information can be collected in an interactive manner, thereby maximizing efficiency and requiring little or no follow up communication after the data has been collected. Moreover, the data which is collected is of the specificity needed for action in refining or improving the products or services.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of a number of linked pages which illustrate generally an

25 exemplary method for collection of comments according to principles of the present invention. In this exemplary embodiment, a number of pages 50, 60, 70, 80, and 90 are provided, which are linked together. Pages 50, 60, 70, 80, and 90 can comprise one or more webpages, such as those written in hypertext mark-up language (HTML), or other screens, displays, views, windows, or portions thereof. The screens are linked together by the links 51, 61, 71, and 81 so that the user is

30 moved consecutively through the corresponding pages by selecting words, icons or symbols in a page to submit the user's evaluations, complaints or ideas regarding products or services. For example, if HTML is used to create the pages, the following command can be utilized to display words (e.g., "Click here for next page") in one page which, when selected by the user using a mouse, will link to the next page in the series (e.g., "www.nextpage.com"):

Click here for next page

Page 50 can be any page displaying information regarding a company's products, and/or services, or other information regarding the company. For example, the page 50 could be a company's homepage, or other webpage maintained by the company. Any or all of these pages
5 can have links to the series of pages 60, 70, 80, and 90 which allow the user to submit evaluations, complaints or ideas regarding the company's products or services. In particular, the page 50 may have links 52, 54, and 56 which will switch the page which is being displayed and allow the user to enter the information requested. In this embodiment, the links 52, 54, and 56 all cause the page 60 to be displayed, so that the user can enter identifying information.

10 More specifically, page 60 displays input areas to allow the user to enter information about himself and to thereby initiate the submission process. In this exemplary embodiment, a number of input areas are provided for the user to provide this information. For example, text boxes 61 and 62 are provided to allow the user to enter his name and email address. If HTML is used to develop the page 60, the following command, or one similar, may be utilized to create the
15 box 61:

<INPUT TYPE="text" NAME="name" SIZE="30">

Similar commands can be used to create box 62, as well as boxes 63 and 64, which allow the user to provide demographic information, such as the user's city and state, or other information desired to be collected by the company. Once the user has entered the requested
20 information, he may then select a product or service to provide evaluations, complaints, or ideas. For example, links 66, 67, and 68 can be provided to link the user to the corresponding page for entrance of this information with respect to the selected product or service.

Selection of the link 66, 67, or 68 displays a page 70 which provides the user with input areas, such as text boxes, checkboxes, radio buttons, text area boxes, pop-up boxes (or pick lists),
25 dialog boxes, buttons, menus, and/or other related input mechanisms which allow the user to provide information regarding the submission. The answers and information which the user is prompted to provide depend on previous selections made in boxes 50 and 60. For example, if the user requested to submit a complaint by selecting link 56, and then selected product A by selecting link 66, the relevant questions and prompts in page 70 will be directed toward
30 submitting a complaint regarding Product A. Likewise, page 70 can be customized with relevant input areas to submit ideas or answer survey related questions or provide other comments regarding other products. Each type of submission for each particular product can be saved as a separate page or file, and that specific file will be displayed when the user selects the corresponding links in pages 60 and 70.

Once the user provides the relevant information requested at page 70, he may click on a submit button or otherwise select to submit this information, to thereby cause the entered data and/or codes associated therewith to be electronically transmitted. For example, a URL can be transmitted having the data and/or codes appended thereto. In response to this electronic information, additional related follow up questions and prompts can be provided in the next page 80. In particular, additional follow up information is displayed which depends upon the data and inputs provided by the user in page 70. For example, as will be described in further detail below, specific problem related questions can be provided depending on the type of problem which is identified in the user's complaint. For instance, if the user identifies a problem with a particular component of a product, the user can be prompted to answer additional questions regarding that component in page 80, such as the specific portion or function of the component which failed and/or the specific circumstances surrounding the failure. By use of page 80, the user does not have to be overwhelmed with questions that are not relevant to the problem, but receives tailored pages for entrance of targeted information regarding the problem. As also indicated by page 80, if the user has submitted survey related information in page 70, more targeted survey questions can be provided in page 80, to attempt to obtain the level of detail needed for further investigating the user's responses in page 70. Likewise, if the user has submitted an idea in page 70, page 80 can be directed toward obtaining a waiver of that idea and/or for providing consideration for that idea. If desired, any of the information submitted by the user can be automatically checked for errors in format and/or sufficiency of information. The user can then be automatically requested to correct the errors and/or submit the omitted information.

Finally, page 90 is directed toward any additional follow up information that may be needed to provide to the user or obtain from the user. This page is displayed in response to the user's submission of the requested information of page 80. As an example, the user may be asked to participate in a follow up targeted survey or study. In addition, the user may be asked to view reference information that relates to the problem which is identified by the user's submissions in pages 70 and/or 80. For instance, if diaper rash is the problem identified in pages 70 or 80, links may be provided to articles, pages, or publications having relevant information regarding diaper rash. Moreover, links can be provided in page 90 to allow the user to once again link to any survey pages, idea pages, or problem submission pages, to allow the user to enter any other or additional information not previously submitted. Finally, page 90 can also serve to thank the user for providing the submission.

While the pages of FIG. 2 preferably comprise linked HTML pages having various input areas for providing the user information, any of a number of other methods, programs, or

configurations could be utilized, such as by providing a series of menus, pop-up lists, or other linked dependent or combined displays. The use of CGI, active server pages, Javascripts and/or Java applets may be utilized in addition to or as alternatives to the methods described to herein to provide the capabilities discussed.

5 FIG. 3 is a flow diagram illustrating an exemplary method for collection of complaints regarding products and services according to principles of the present invention. In this exemplary embodiment, at block 100, the user is asked or prompted to submit a complaint regarding a product or service. This can be provided, for instance, by use of a link on a webpage, or by providing a web address on a package or other literature. The user then responds by
10 electronically requesting to submit a complaint at block 102, such as by selecting the link, typing the web address to obtain the complaint form, or otherwise electronically contacting the product or service provider. In response to this request, the company electronically prompts the user to identify the product or service to which the complaint applies, at block 104. This can be accomplished, for example, by providing a pop-up box listing the corresponding products or
15 services, by providing a menu from which the user may select, or by providing a text box for typing the product or service, for example.

 The user may also be electronically prompted to enter identification information at block 106. Such information can include the user's name, email address, demographic information and/or psychographic information. At block 108, the user is prompted to describe the problem
20 experienced with the product or service. Preferably, a pop-up list or pick list is provided from which the user may select the problem encountered. The user then provides an electronic input, at block 109, indicating the problem encountered, such as by selecting the problem from the pop-up list and selecting a submit button for example. In the example of a diaper product, the user may be allowed to select from a list to indicate whether the problem pertained to the diaper fastening
25 system, the diaper absorbent system, the diaper fit, or the diaper construction.

 In response to the general problem identified by the user at block 109, targeted questions are electronically and automatically selected at block 110 to further investigate the type of failure and/or the circumstances surrounding the failure. For example, if a problem with a specific component is identified in block 109, a page or menu or dataset, can be automatically selected
30 which includes a list of functions of the component which failed. Links to pages including the targeted questions may be utilized to select the targeted questions based upon the user input.

 Once the general problem is selected and/or submitted, the corresponding targeted questions may then be electronically displayed to the user, as shown at block 112. For example, the page selected at block 110 can be displayed to the user at block 112 and prompt the user to

enter specific functions and/or subcomponents which failed. At block 113, the user enters the specific failing functions and/or subcomponents. For instance, in the diaper example, if the user entered that the diaper fastening system failed at block 109, then the user may be prompted to indicate, such as by selecting from a list, whether the diaper adhesive tapes would not adhere, whether the tapes were missing, whether the tapes could not be opened, or whether the tapes were adhered to another component. The user could also be provided with a diagram from which to select the location of the problem or the components contributing to the problems. The user provides these selections at block 113.

In response to the answer provided at block 113, a set of follow up questions regarding the circumstances of the failure are electronically and automatically selected at block 114. For example, specific questions may be selected regarding how the failing component was used, the person or persons using that component, and/or the frequency of the use. These selected circumstances are electronically displayed to the user at block 116, and the user electronically selects answers to the questions at block 117. In the diaper example, if the user selected a fastening system problem at block 109 and the specific problem was identified at block 113 as being that the tapes did not adhere, then the user could be asked specific questions regarding the tape adhesion failure, such as how many times the tapes were opened prior to not adhering, and whether lotion, powder or medication was applied to the baby when the tapes did not adhere.

After the user enters the specific circumstances responses at block 117, the method continues to block 118, where the user is thanked for providing the information and directed to relevant information regarding the problem. For example, if the problem selected in blocks 109, 113, or 117 was diaper rash, the user could be provided with links or pages displaying articles or information related to diaper rash. In addition, the user may be prompted to submit an idea related to the problem, at block 120, such as by providing a link to an idea submission form (such as those described below). At block 120, the data entered by the user is automatically stored in a data bank for electronic retrieval by company personnel. For example, the problem which is electronically entered at block 109 can be stored, the targeted answers regarding the problem which are electronically entered at block 113 can be stored, and the specific circumstances surrounding the problem which are electronically entered at block 117 can be stored. This data can be made immediately available over a network to company personnel for use in improving the product or service.

FIG. 4a, and continuing to FIG. 4b, illustrates an exemplary page for use in collection of complaints according to the method of FIG. 3. In particular, input areas 140, 142, 144, and 146 allow the user to present identity information regarding the user of the product, in this example, a

diaper. For instance, radio buttons 140 can be provided to enter the gender of the baby, pop-up list 142 can be provided to enter the age range of the baby, pop-up list 144 can be provided to enter the weight of the baby, and pop-up list 146 can be provided to enter the diaper size of the baby. Other general identification information can also be provided, by using the input areas 150, 152, and 154. For example, radio boxes 150 can be provided to graphically provide assistance and allow the user to identify the brand to which the complaint pertains. Graphics, such as product images 151 for example, can assist the user in identifying the product at issue. In addition, pop-up list 152 can be provided to identify the number of products in the package, and text box 154 can be provided to allow the user to identify the package. Of course, other relevant information can be requested as desired, and any of a variety of suitable input areas may be used to allow the user to enter this information.

The user may use input area 156 to select from a list of potential problems generally relating to the type of product at issue. Preferably, the input area 156 comprises a pop-up list so that the user's choices are limited and so that future follow up questions can be automatically and electronically submitted to the user in response to the general question identified. In the example of FIG. 4a, the user has selected "malfunction of fastening system" as being the general problem at issue. Entering data in this input area 156 corresponds to block 109 of FIG. 3. Graphical assistance can also be provided to aid the user in identifying the problem experienced. For instance, pictures, images, drawings, and/or schematics can be displayed, and portions of these can be selected by the user to indicate the location or component related to the malfunction. The program can automatically detect which portion has been selected and store this information. Such an embodiment is depicted in FIG. 4a, where an image 157 is provided and the user may select a location on the image to indicate where the problem occurred. Alternatively, a check box can be positioned near various locations or components of the product, and the user may check the relevant boxes.

The user can be prompted to provide other general information regarding the problem experienced. For example, the frequency of the problem can be indicated by using the list 158, the future purchase effect of the problem can be indicated using list 160, additional verbatim information can be provided using text box 162, verbatim idea information can be provided using text box 164, and idea benefits information can be provided using list 166 in order to indicate the benefits that the user's idea will provide. All of the information entered by the user using the page of FIGS. 4a and 4b can be submitted to the server using the submit button 168. If HTML is used to supply such a button, the button can be provided by using the following or similar HTML command: `<INPUT TYPE="submit">`.

Once the user has identified and submitted the general type of problem experienced, such as by using input area 156 of FIG. 4a, more specific information regarding this general problem can be electronically and automatically requested, in response to the users input, and, once collected, used to improve or create products or services. FIG. 5 illustrates exemplary pages that may be automatically displayed to prompt the user to enter such detailed information in response to the user's selection of "malfunction of fastening system" in the page of FIGS. 4a and 4b. In particular, the user can be provided with an input area 170 in one or more pages which allows the user to provide more specific information related to the general problem selected. In particular, in the example of FIG. 5, the user is provided with a list of specific problems which relate to the general problem, "malfunction of fastening system." In this example, the user may select from specific problems such as "tapes won't adhere," "tape was open and stuck to backsheet or liner," "one or more tapes were missing," and "tape could not be opened." This input area 170 may be displayed in the same page as input area 156, or may be displayed in a separate and/or subsequent page. The content of this input area 170 is dependent upon what is selected by the user in input area 156, as each general problem has specific problems relating thereto. Entering data in this box corresponds to block 113 of FIG. 3.

In response to the selection made through input area 170, additional questions are preferably displayed in a page or menu 172, the content of which depend upon the user's selection in area 170. For example, if the specific problem selected by the user from box 170 is "tapes won't adhere," a list of targeted questions regarding circumstances corresponding to this specific problem will be displayed in box 172. These targeted questions can include specific questions regarding potential causations of the problem experienced. For example, if the user selects "tapes won't adhere" in box 170, it may be relevant how many times the tapes had been opened, and whether lotion, power or medication was used. Accordingly, the user can be provided with input areas 174 and 176 to answer these questions. In this example, the input area 174 is a radio box so that the user may select the number of times the tapes had been opened, and the input area 176 is a checkbox so that the user may select what product or products had been used. Once this additional information is submitted by the user, another page 178 may be provided to thank the user for the information, and also to direct the user to potential sources of information regarding the problem experienced, if such information is available. For example, if the user experienced problems with diaper tapes adhering, it may be desirable to provide a link 179 to an article or other information on how to maximize the life of the tapes utilized.

By providing input areas 170 and 174 in response to the general problem category identified in box 156, relevant specific data to improve products or services can be obtained from

the user automatically at any time of the day and without requiring any future contacting of the user. Moreover, the user is only presented with questions or prompts regarding information relating to the problem encountered and is not forced to read through numerous unrelated questions and prompts, thereby maximizing efficiency and increasing the chances that the user will actually respond to the requested information. In addition, this electronic method of collection of specific data allows the specific data to be immediately available for electronic retrieval and analysis in developing and improving the products or services. Furthermore, by providing a response to the user through page 178 and directing the user to articles or other information relevant to the problem, the user will feel as if his specific problem has been personally considered.

It should be understood that the pages illustrated in FIGS. 4a, 4b, and 5 are merely examples with respect to a diaper product, and these examples are not to be regarded as restrictive in nature. The exemplary pages may be modified as needed for use in assisting users in submitting complaints regarding problems experienced with respect to any of a variety of products and services. The number and type of general problems and corresponding specific problems which are displayed can be modified and customized to fit the particular potential problems which may be encountered. The other information requested can also be modified as desired and as suitable for the particular product or service at issue. Accordingly, the methods and systems described herein can be applied to a variety of services as well as a variety of products and articles of manufacture, including consumer products, electronics, foods, household products, appliances, computer related products, machinery, and the like. Depending on the product or service at issue, a series of dependent question sets can be presented to the user, each set being presented in response to a previous answer from the user, and each set requesting additional detail regarding the previous answer. Accordingly, an actionable level of detail can be obtained such that products or services can be improved, refined, and/or created.

For example, if the user identified diaper rash in one of the screens as being the problem experienced, a series of questions could be automatically and electronically provided which relate only to diaper rash, such as by using dependent pages, dependent screens, main and sub-menus, a hierarchical page or menu system, or other dependent electronic display method. For instance, the user could be asked to comment on how long the baby has experienced diaper rash in the past three months, such as by selecting from a plurality of predetermined possible choices using a pop-up list or radio boxes. The user could also be asked to comment on the location of the rash, and the size of the rash, also by selecting from a predetermined list or boxes or from an image or other graphic. The user could also be asked to select a color from a predetermined array of colors

which best describes the redness of the rash. Moreover, the user could be asked to select from a list of foods and drinks which the baby consumed during the days preceding the rash. The user could also be asked to enter, using a keyboard, the weight of the diaper and the length of time the diaper was worn before being changed. In addition, the user may be asked to select from a list or to select input boxes to indicate the types of substances applied to the baby, such as oil, powder or ointment for example. Furthermore, the user could be asked to select the material in the diaper, such as by selecting from urine, solid waste, or semi-solid waste. As can be understood, the users responses to any of the questions can be automatically and electronically checked, compared, or otherwise analyzed, and additional tailored follow up questions provided based upon the responses. For example, if the user indicated that the diaper contained solid or semi-solid waste, a follow up question could be automatically and electronically provided which requests the user to enter via the keyboard the length of time that this waste was in the diaper prior to changing the diaper.

Moreover, any of a variety of pages, displays, programs, files, images, software, input mechanisms, routines, presentations and/or configurations can be utilized to prompt the user to electronically submit the information regarding the problem experienced. For instance, rather than using dependent pages described herein, other software techniques could be utilized, such as dependent screens, main and sub-menus, a hierarchical page or menu system, or other dependent electronic display method.

Accordingly, as can be understood, a variety of variations and sequences are possible based upon the specific product or service at issue and the categories and sub-categories of relevant questions relating to that product or service. Also, any of a variety of software and hardware mechanisms can be utilized to automatically and electronically present the relevant questions to the user and automatically and electronically obtain the answers from the user.

FIG. 6 is a flow diagram illustrating an exemplary method for collection of ratings and comments regarding products and services according to principles of the present invention. In this exemplary embodiment, the user is prompted to take a survey to evaluate or rate a product or service, at block 200. At block 202, an electronic requests is provided by the user to evaluate the product or service, preferably by selecting a link which requests or contacts a webpage provided by a server. This link can be provided from other webpages hosted by the server.

The user is then prompted or requested to identify a particular product or service to evaluate, at block 204. This can be accomplished by providing links or other input areas to use in selecting the product or service which the user desires to evaluate. The selection is made by the user at block 206. Based upon the selection provided by the user at block 206, targeted

performance areas relating to this product or service are selected at block 208, such as by connecting to a page which lists the corresponding performance areas to be evaluated for that particular product or service selected, or by selecting data containing these corresponding performance areas. The user is then electronically prompted to evaluate the selected targeted performance areas, at block 210. For example, if a webpage is selected at block 208 in response to the user's input, the webpage may include text which prompts the user to evaluate the performance areas. The webpage may also include input areas to allow the user to provide responses to the prompts and evaluate the various performance areas. In FIG. 6, the user evaluations are provided at block 211.

In addition, general performance areas relating the product or service may be selected at block 212, in response to the users selection at block 206, such as by connecting to a page which lists the corresponding general areas to be evaluated for that particular product or service selected. This selection can be can be combined with block 208, such that the corresponding targeted performance areas and corresponding general performance areas are selected in a single step. At block 214, the user is electronically requested to evaluate the general performance areas, such as by displaying text and input areas within the selected page. Then, at block 215, the user may evaluate the various general performance areas, such as by providing inputs in the input areas corresponding to the text prompts.

At block 218, the user is electronically requested to provide any additional information appropriate in evaluating the product or service, such as verbatim comments and/or other evaluations in corresponding input areas. The user may also be requested to provide identification information, demographic information, and/or other information regarding the user, at block 218. After submission of all data by the user, the user may be provided with an automatic response, at block 220. Such a response may indicate appreciation and/or provide links to other relevant information or pages regarding the products or services evaluated. At block 222, all data submitted by the user is electronically stored in a data bank for immediate access by personnel in improving and developing the products or services.

FIG. 7a, continuing to FIG. 7b, illustrates an exemplary page for use in collection of ratings and evaluations according to the method of FIG. 6. In this example, the user has already indicated that he would like to evaluate diapers, such as by providing this indication using an input area in another page. Accordingly, in response to this input, the page of FIGS. 7a and 7b is displayed with the relevant questions to allow the user to provide the evaluation information. In particular, input areas can be provided to allow the user to enter information regarding the user's child. For example, radio box 230 can be provided to allow the user to indicate the gender of the

child, pop-up box 232 can be provided to allow the user to select the child's age range, pop-up box 234 can be provided to allow the user to select the child's weight, and pop-up box 236 can be provided to allow the user to select the child's diaper size. Other input areas may also be provided as desired. For instance, pop-up box 240 allows the user to select other diaper brands which have been used, and text box 242 allows the user to type in a brand if it is not listed in box 240.

The page of FIGS. 7a and 7b also includes relevant performance areas targeted toward evaluation of a diaper. If other products had been selected in the previous page, then the performance areas which are displayed would be targeted towards the selected product. In the example of FIGS. 7a and 7b, various potential problems are displayed using text 243. These problems are specific to the product being evaluated. In this example, the product being evaluated is a diaper, so the potential problems displayed using text 243 might include "caused pressure marks," "caused skin rash," "did not keep skin dry," "had unpleasant odor," "tape problems," "gel on skin," etc. The user can then evaluate a brand with respect to these potential problems by using the input areas 244 and 246. In particular, pop-up boxes 244 can be utilized to select the relative frequency (e.g., very often, sometimes, never) of the corresponding problem of list 243, and pop-up boxes 246 can be utilized to select the corresponding importance and effect on purchasing decisions (e.g., will buy just as often, will be less often, will not buy again). Another brand can be evaluated under these same targeted performance areas by using the boxes 248 and 250, so that the two brands can be rated and compared side by side.

General performance areas can also be evaluated using the exemplary page of FIG. 7a and 7b. For example, general performance areas can be listed using text list 252. In this example, the general performance areas included "quality," "value," "performance," "comfort," "convenience," "environment," and "overall." Pop-up boxes 254 and 256 can then be utilized to select a rating (e.g., excellent, very good, good, fair, poor) from a list of ratings for each corresponding general performance area, for two brands.

Other input areas can also be provided to allow the user to enter additional ratings, comments, and/or evaluations. For instance, text box 258 can be provided to allow the user to identify why one brand is better than another, text area 260 can be provided to allow the user to enter improvements or suggestions, and box 262 can be provided to allow the user to select a benefit provided by the improvement. A submit button 264 can be provided to allow the user to send all of the information entered in the page to the server. This information can be saved in a data bank on a computer readable medium and can be made immediately available for electronic retrieval and analysis in improving products or services.

FIG. 8a, continuing to FIG. 8b, illustrates an exemplary page for use in collection of ratings and evaluations according to the method of FIG. 6. In this example, ratings are collected from a retailer or other business party, rather than from a consumer. Input areas can be provided for the retailer to identify himself. For example, boxes 270 and 272 can be provided to allow the retailer to identify his company, boxes 274, 275, and 276 can be provided to select the location of the user's store, buttons 277 and box 278 can be provided to allow the user to identify his position in the company, and buttons 279 can be provided to allow the user to indicate his specific job duties.

Area 280 is provided, either in an additional or the same page, to allow the user to rate various general performance areas related to services and products provided by the company. For example, text 282 is provided to prompt the user to evaluate the areas of communication, ordering, delivery, receiving, stocking, billing, promotion, in store service, special displays, consumer satisfaction, product and package quality, returning, and overall satisfaction. Corresponding to the text 282 are boxes 284 which allow the user to provide a ranking corresponding to the performance area. A rating scale such as excellent, very good, good, fair and poor could be utilized, as could a scale such as best, above average, average, below average, and poor, or any other suitable ratings scale. Also provided for each performance area are boxes 286 which allow the user to select a company which is the best in the class for the given area of performance. An additional text area 288 can be provided to allow the user to enter other suggestions or improvements. Once the user selects the submit button 289, the data provided is sent to the server and is stored in a data bank for electronic retrieval and analysis by company personnel in improving products and services.

FIG. 9 is a flow diagram illustrating an exemplary method for collection of ideas regarding products and services according to principles of the present invention. In this example, the method can be invoked by indicating, preferably from one of the company webpages, that the user desires to submit an idea such as a suggestion or invention or improvement. Such an indication can link to a page which electronically requests or prompts the user to indicate whether the idea or invention is protected by a patent, is confidential, or will be protected by a patent. This step is shown at block 302 of FIG. 9. For instance, an input area can be provided to allow the user to indicate whether the idea is patented, confidential, or will be patented. The user's response to this inquiry is then analyzed at block 304. If the user answered in the affirmative, then a page can be directed to a technology acquisition page at block 306, to provide the user with information in contacting the company manually to discuss acquisition of the technology. If the user answered in the negative, then an automatic idea acquisition process can be initiated. For

example, the user may be electronically prompted to enter information regarding the idea, such as by providing input areas for the user to identify and describe the concept and to identify himself. This is shown at block 308 of FIG. 9.

5 The user may also be requested or prompted to categorize the idea, such as by selecting a field or product to which it relates, or a benefit it will provide. This step is shown at block 310 of FIG. 9. At block 312, one or more legal documents are displayed to the user which explain the transfer process, the legal consequences thereof, and/or the user's agreement to waive various rights by submitting the idea. In this example, the document may indicate that the user agrees that the submission is voluntary, that it does not establish a confidential or contractual relationship,
10 that the use of the idea is within the company's discretion, that ideas covered by patents or patent applications cannot be submitted, that the user is the owner of the idea and is legally free to transfer rights to it, that the rights disclosed in the document cannot be waived or modified, and that there are no other agreements between the user and the company. Such documents can be displayed via one or more pages. At block 314, the user is electronically requested whether he
15 agrees to the information displayed in the legal document(s). At block 316, it is determined whether the user has agreed to the provisions of the legal documents and thereby waives rights to the idea. For example, it can be determined whether the user checked or selected a box indicating that the user waives rights to the idea. If a waiver is not received, block 318 is executed and a display is provided indicating that the idea has not been accepted by the company.

20 However, if a waiver is indicated, an automatic electronic response is provided at block 322. For example, the user may be thanked for submitting the idea, or asked for additional information or waiver of rights. In addition, at block 322, consideration may be provided by the company in return for the idea. For instance, the company server may send to the user an electronic game to play in return for the idea. Alternatively or in addition, the server may send
25 electronic coupons, which the user may print out and use for discounts on goods or services. Moreover, the server may transfer software for use by the user, and/or provide access to information or webpages not provided to the public. For example, the submitter may be provided access to a search webpage to allow the user to search for retailers which provide the company's products. Access to links or information relating to the company's products could also be
30 provided, as could information regarding sales, discounts, upcoming events etc. As another possibility for providing electronic consideration, the user's name could be published on a page commending all those users who have contributed ideas to the company. An electronic award or certificate could also be provided to the user to indicate that the user has contributed an idea to the company. Prior to providing such electronic consideration to the user, it may also be desirable to

electronically explain/display the type of consideration that will be provided in exchange for the idea, and to obtain an electronic indication from the user that the user acknowledges that this electronic consideration will be provided in exchange for the idea, and that no other consideration will be provided by the company. If the user refuses to provide such an indication, the submission may be refused.

Once the electronic consideration has been provided at block 322, the idea may be stored in a data bank. Preferably, this data bank is available for immediate electronic access by product development personnel in improving and refining products or services.

FIGS. 10 and 11 illustrate exemplary pages for use in collection of ideas according to the method of FIG. 9. In this example, links 330 and 332 are provided to allow the user to indicate whether the idea is confidential, patented, or planned for patenting. In this example, the user selects link 330 if the idea is confidential, patented, or planned for patenting, and the user selects link 332 if this is not the case. Selecting link 330 will provide information to the user on the manual procedures for transferring such ideas. Selecting link 332 connects the user to another page for automatic transfer of the idea. FIGS. 11a and 11b illustrate an example of such a page.

In particular, in the exemplary page of FIGS. 11a and 11b, the user is prompted to enter a title for the idea, in text box 336. The idea can then be described in detail using text area 338. In addition, the user can be prompted to categorize the benefit intended to be provided by the idea using box 340. Box 342 can be provided to allow the user to select which products or services will benefit from the submission of the idea. Text boxes 344 allow the user to provide identification and contact information, such as name address, telephone numbers, email address, and birthdate. Checkboxes 350, 352, and 354 allow the user to provide an indication that he agrees that rights to the idea are waived and that the idea is dedicated to the company. In this example, box 350 is selected by the user to indicate that the user has read and understands the Waiver of Rights document. Link 351 may be provided to link the user to a waiver of rights page, which may contain language similar to that of the page of FIG. 13 for example. Box 352 is selected by the user to indicate that the user agrees to that waiver of rights. Similarly, box 354 is selected by the user to indicate that the user waives all rights to the idea and dedicates it to the company.

While three boxes 350, 352, and 354 are provided in the example of FIG. 11 to provide an indication that the user agrees to the terms of the submission and waives rights to the idea, fewer or more such boxes or input areas may be provided to obtain an enforceable indication and agreement from the user. For example, a single box can be provided to indicate that the user agrees to the statements indicated.

To submit the idea and the other inputs provided, the user can select the submission button 356. If the user decides not to submit the idea, link 358 can be provided to send the user to pages having information regarding manually contacting the company regarding idea submissions.

5 The user submissions can be compared to required submissions to determine whether the idea will be accepted. For example, it can be automatically decided whether all three boxes 350, 352, and 354 have been checked by the user. (Preferably, all three boxes are initially set to contain no checkmark.) If it is determined that one of these boxes has not been checked, the user will be given an indication that the idea will not be accepted without an indication that the user
10 agrees to the terms stated. If all required submissions have been provided, a page can be displayed indicating the company's appreciation for the idea. In addition, some form of consideration, such as those described above, can be automatically and electronically provided to the user. The idea may then be stored in a data bank for electronic retrieval by company personnel.

15 FIG. 12 is a flow diagram illustrating an exemplary alternative method for collection of ideas regarding products and services according to principles of the present invention. In this exemplary embodiment, an electronic request or prompt is provided at block 400 to ask the user to indicate whether the idea to be submitted is confidential, covered by a patent or patent application, or planned to be covered by a patent application. At block 402, the user's answer to
20 this request is provided, and if the answer is in the affirmative, a page is provided at block 404 indicating the manual technology acquisition procedures. If the request is answered in the negative, the process proceeds to block 406 where various legal requirements of the transfer are displayed, such as a waiver of rights, an agreement, or other legal statement regarding the transfer. The user is then prompted at block 408 to indicate that various rights to the idea are waived and
25 that the idea is fully transferred to the company. Various input boxes can be provided for indication that rights are waived and to obtain the user's agreement to various provisions and conditions of the transfer. At block 410, the idea is electronically provided, such as through a text area, and at block 412, the submitter's identity is provided. The submission is then searched, at block 414 for various problematic keywords. For example, terms such as "payment" or "money"
30 or "\$" may indicate that the user is expecting monetary consideration for the idea. If such keywords are found, then a page may be displayed at block 418 to indicate that the idea has not been accepted. If such keywords are not found, then the process may proceed to block 420 to review the submission for an acceptable idea and for proper waiver of rights. If it is decided at block 422 that rights have not been waived or the idea is not acceptable, then block 418 can be

executed to indicate that the idea has not been accepted. However, if the idea is acceptable and rights have been waived, block 424 can be executed to provide an electronic indication to the user that the idea has been accepted. The idea may then be stored in a data bank at block 426, and electronic compensation can be provided at block 428, such as in the forms discussed above.

5 FIG. 13 illustrates an alternative waiver of rights page for use in automatic collection of ideas according to principles of the present invention. In this example, the user reaches this page by electronically indicating, such as by clicking on a link, that the user wishes to submit an idea or suggestion. The page includes an agreement that waives the user's rights to the idea. If the idea is covered by a pending patent application or issued patent, then the user is directed to click on
10 link 360 to view other pages for submission of the idea. If not, the user is directed to read the waiver of rights and agreement language 362. In this example, the agreement indicates that the submission is voluntary, that no confidential or contractual relationships is established, that the company to which the idea is submitted is not liable for any disclosure of the idea and is not obligated to use the idea, and that the user has not received the idea from another and is free to
15 submit the idea. Moreover, the agreement may contain language that the idea will be the deemed the sole property of the company, that the company shall exclusively own all rights to the idea, that the company shall be entitled to unrestricted use of the idea without compensation, that the conditions are not subject to changes, and that no other agreements exist between the user and company. In this embodiment, no compensation is given, as the company's time and expense in
20 review and evaluation of the idea is consideration for the submission.

 The user is then directed to check the boxes 364 and 365 which apply. Check box 364 indicates that the user has read and understands the waiver of rights language 362, and check box 365 indicates that the user agrees to be bound by the waiver of rights. In addition, radio boxes 366 are for use by the user for indicating, if he has checked both boxes 364 and 365, whether he
25 agrees with additional agreement language 367, which indicates that the user waives all claims of ownership and confidentiality, and that the submission belongs to the company. Box 366A is utilized to indicate an agreement with the additional language 367 and box 366B is used to indicate disagreement with the language 367. Preferably, none of the boxes 364, 365, 366A, or 366B are pre-selected prior to displaying the page of FIG. 13 to the user.

30 Upon clicking a submit button 368, data will be sent to the company server to indicate which boxes 364, 365, 366A, and 366B have been checked. The server analyzes the data and determines if the user checked all of boxes 364, 365, and 366A before clicking the button 368. If all of these buttons have not been checked, the user can be returned to the page of FIG. 13, and an electronic indication can be provided that the user must agree to the provisions by checking the

appropriate boxes in order for the idea to be accepted. Alternatively, the user could be directed to another portion of the site in deference to his decision not to agree to the terms. If the boxes 364, 365, and 366A have all been selected, then an idea submission box, list, and/or other input area can be displayed to allow the user to enter and submit the idea. Preferably, each time the user wishes to submit an idea, the page of FIG. 13 is displayed and the boxes 364, 365, and 366A must be selected to allow the user access to an idea submission page. It is also preferred that the user responses to the boxes of FIG. 13 are recorded and logged to prove that the user read and agreed to the terms before submitting the idea. As an alternative to the page presentation described above, an automated e-mail system or other automated electronic system could be utilized to request whether the user wishes to waive rights to the idea, and to collect the idea submission.

FIG. 15 is a flow diagram illustrating an exemplary method for automatic collection and transfer of ideas. At block 450, the user selects an idea submission link, such as by selecting a hyperlink on a webpage. In automatic response to this selection, a waiver of rights and/or agreement are electronically displayed to the user, as shown at block 452. At block 454, the user electronically indicates whether to be bound by the displayed agreement and/or waiver, such as by selecting a box or typing a response. The user's response is then analyzed at decision block 456 to determine whether an agreement to be bound by the terms has been indicated. If not, then the display can return to the waiver of rights display of block 452. If agreement has been indicated, then an idea submission form can be displayed, at block 458. The user can then enter the idea using the form, as shown at block 460, such as by using input devices. Once the information is submitted by the user, it can be stored, as shown at block 462.

Accordingly, the idea submission methods and pages described above can be provided to efficiently and legally transfer rights to an idea at any time of the day, and make the idea immediately and electronically available for use in improving products or services.

Moreover, as discussed above, the complaint, evaluation, and idea submission pages, displays, and software can be linked or otherwise integrated in order to provide a single, efficient method and system for collection of this information, at a convenient and relevant time for the customer. All of the data collected, whether related to complaints, evaluations, or ideas, is preferably accessible by a single data analysis software tool which can run on a plurality of computers to allow immediate access to the data by a large number of individuals. Employees are not required to manually administer or collect the information, and relevant, detailed information can be collected quickly and inexpensively. The software can provide personalized responses to the customer by obtaining identity information from the customer, and can also provide

immediate electronic access to relevant information specifically tailored to the evaluation, complaint, or idea entered by the customer.

EXAMPLE

5 The following example describes an exemplary integrated system and method for implementing the embodiments described above. In this example, the user electronically indicates that there has been a problem with a product or service, such as by selecting a hyperlink for example. A page is then displayed in response to the selection of the link and the user is allowed to select from a pop-up list of potential categories of problems. The users selection is then electronically analyzed to determine follow-up questions regarding the problem. Decision
10 trees can be utilized for this analysis. A decision tree typically is a set of responses or categories against which the user input can be compared. For example, a decision tree preferably comprises every combination of possible user input. The user input is then compared against the decision tree for a matching branch and the matching branch provides further instructions to be executed as a result of the match. Such decision trees preferably comprise potential combinations of user
15 input with the interactive system which have been designed with the system's intended application in mind, so that appropriate stages can be established that pertain to the desired exchange of information. Preferably, the decision trees are converted to mathematical algorithms which then process the decision tree comparison or "decisions" electronically to ascertain the appropriate response to electronically provide to the user. The algorithm may run on a host or
20 server, such as by using a script program such as CGI script for example, and/or can be downloaded from the server, along with any corresponding data, and run on the client, such as by using a Java applet.

In response to the user's electronic indication of the product or service problem, one or more specific questions are automatically selected and electronically displayed which relate to the
25 problem. For instance, if the problem selected indicated that a diaper fastening system failed, then the user may be electronically prompted to indicate, such as by selecting from a list, whether the diaper adhesive tapes would not adhere, whether the tapes were missing, whether the tapes could not be opened, or whether the tapes were stuck to another component. The user could also be electronically provided with a diagram from which to select the location of the problem or the
30 components contributing to the problems. Then, in response to these additional inputs, an additional set of follow up questions can be electronically and automatically displayed to the user. In the diaper example, if the user selected the general problem as being with the fastening system and the specific problem as being that the tapes did not adhere, then the user could be automatically and electronically provided with specific questions regarding the tape adhesion

failure, such as how many times the tapes were opened prior to not adhering, and whether lotion, powder or medication was applied to the baby when the failure occurred. Additional follow up questions can be automatically and electronically provided as needed.

5 Once all of inputs regarding the problem have been provided by the user, the user can then be presented with a display which requests the user to enter another complaint, take a survey or submit an idea regarding the product or service. If the user selects to take a survey, a set of relevant questions can be automatically and electronically selected and displayed which relate to the product or service at issue. In response to the user's inputs in answering the questions, additional follow up questions can be electronically and automatically provided to the user as
10 needed. Once the survey is completed, the user can again be requested to enter another complaint, take another survey, or enter idea. If the user input indicates he wishes to submit an idea, a waiver of rights agreement can be electronically and automatically displayed to the user. The user may then electronically indicate whether he agrees with the waiver of rights, and the user input can be electronically analyzed to determined if agreement has been indicated. If agreement has
15 been indicated, then an idea submission form can be electronically and automatically provided to the user for inputting information regarding the idea. All of the user inputs regarding complaints, survey responses, and idea submissions may be stored in one or more databanks for electronic retrieval and analysis.

20 As can be understood, the programs and software described above may be executed or run on any general or special purpose computer or other digital processing apparatus, such as a desktop computer, a server and/or client computer interconnected by a network (for example, either via the Internet or an Intranet), a micro-computer, hand-held organizers and other forms of computers and computer systems as desired. Exemplary networked computers are illustrated schematically in Fig. 1. The computer preferably comprises a logic circuit (such as central
25 processing unit, microprocessor or other micro controller) capable of executing the program. The program, or portions thereof, can be provided as a program product, wherein the program product includes a signal bearing medium. The signal bearing medium can be provided in the form of an optical disk, a magnetic disk, a magnetic hard drive, a magnetic tape, RAM, ROM, or any other magnetic, optical, or other computer readable storage medium which can be configured to store
30 data and/or machine readable instructions which cause the logic circuit to which it is connected to perform the steps discussed. Alternatively, the instructions may be contained in other signal bearing media including digital and analog communication links (e.g., such as a wire or fiber portion of a local area network, a wire or fiber portion of a wide area network, a portion of a wireless network, etc.), a carrier wave or propagated signal, and other forms of transmission

media. The computer also preferably comprises one or more input/output peripherals, such as a keyboard, mouse, touch screen, microphone, display monitor, printer, etc., which can be interconnected with the logic circuit via a system bus and adapter.

5 The foregoing descriptions of the preferred embodiments of the invention have been presented for purposes of illustration and description only. They are not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed, and modifications and variations are possible and contemplated in light of the above teachings. While a number of preferred and alternate embodiments, methods, systems, displays, interfaces, pages, configurations, and potential applications have been described, it should be understood that many variations and
10 alternatives could be utilized without departing from the scope of the invention. Moreover, although a variety of potential configurations and components have been described, it should be understood that a number of other configurations and components could be utilized without departing from the scope of the invention.

15 Thus, it should be understood that the embodiments and examples have been chosen and described in order to best illustrate the principals of the invention and its practical applications to thereby enable one of ordinary skill in the art to best utilize the invention in various embodiments and with various modifications as are suited for particular uses contemplated. Accordingly, it is intended that the scope of the invention be defined by the claims appended hereto.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A network-based method of obtaining comments regarding products or services from a customer, comprising the steps of:

transmitting a page using a computer network, the page including a plurality of general problem types corresponding to potential problems regarding products or services;

receiving through the computer network a general problem type inputted by a customer;

in response to the general problem type received, characterized by automatically prompting the customer to input specific information regarding the general problem type received; and

receiving through the computer network specific information inputted by the customer regarding the general problem type.

2. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of:

in response to the general problem type received, displaying to the customer a list of questions regarding circumstances corresponding to the general problem type received.

3. A computer system for obtaining comments regarding products from customers, comprising:

at least one server hosting comment collection software accessible via a network by at least one client, wherein the comment collection software provides input controls adapted for inputting of comments by a customer relating to products or services, the input controls including a set of input areas including an idea submission input area, a complaint input area, and an evaluation input area; and

a data bank adapted to record the information characterized by the comment collection software is adapted to receive a general problem type from the customer and to prompt the customer to enter specific information in response to the general problem type received.

4. The system as recited in claim 3, characterized by in that the comment collection software is adapted to receive a waiver input from the customer indicating that rights to an idea are waived.

5. A network-based method of obtaining ideas regarding products or services from a customer comprising:

electronically receiving from a customer an input indicating that the customer wishes to submit an idea regarding products or services;

in response to the input, characterized by automatically and electronically prompting the customer to indicate whether the customer wishes to surrender rights to the idea;

electronically receiving from the customer a waiver input indicating that rights to the idea are surrendered;

electronically receiving from the customer the idea; and
automatically storing the idea in a data bank.

6. The method as recited in claim 5 characterized by:

in response to the received idea, automatically and electronically providing compensation to the customer for the idea.

7. A network-based method of obtaining ideas regarding products or services from a customer comprising:

providing a web site having a user interface;

prompting the customer through the user interface to enter comments regarding a product or service provided to the customer;

prompting the customer through the user interface to enter an idea regarding the product or service;

prompting the customer through the user interface to waive rights to the idea;

receiving through the user interface the idea from the customer; and characterized

by

receiving through the user interface a waiver indication from the customer that

rights to the idea are waived.

8. The method as recited in claim 7, further comprising:

receiving comments from the customer regarding products or services through the user interface; and

in response to the comments received, prompting the customer through the user interface to enter specific information related to the comments received.

9. A network-based method of obtaining information regarding products or services from a customer comprising:

providing a web site having a user interface;

prompting the customer through the user interface to select at least one product or service for providing comments;

receiving through the user interface a selection identifying the at least one product or service;

in response to the identification selection, characterized by selecting a set of performance rating categories corresponding to the at least one product or service, and prompting the customer through the user interface to select performance ratings for the performance rating categories; and

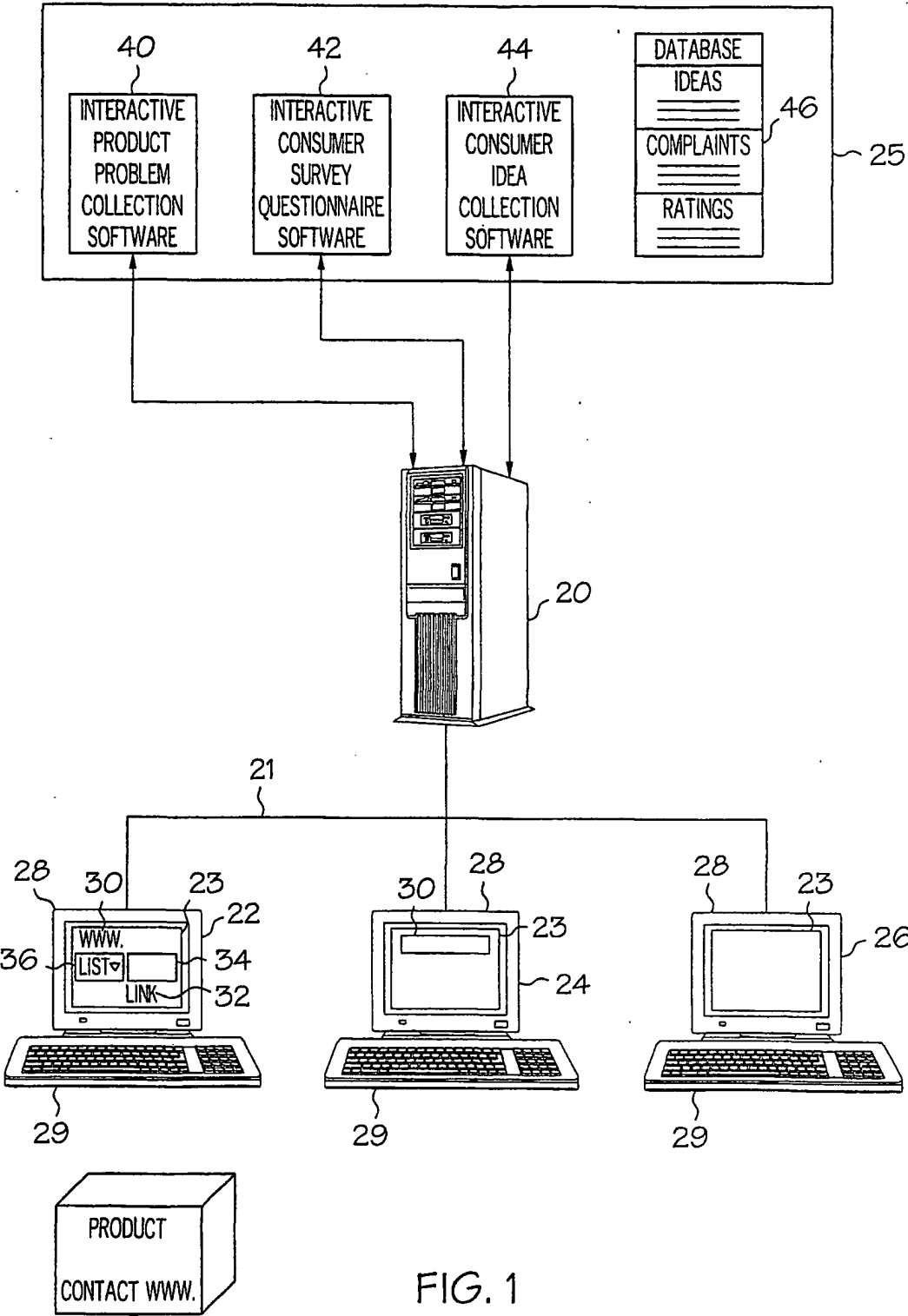
receiving at the user interface the performance rating selections.

10. A method for receiving customer comments regarding a product, comprising:

transmitting a digital image representing a product;

electronically prompting the user to select at least a portion of the image to indicate a problem experienced with the product; and characterized by

electronically receiving a product problem type corresponding to the selection of the image by the user to indicate the problem experienced with the product.



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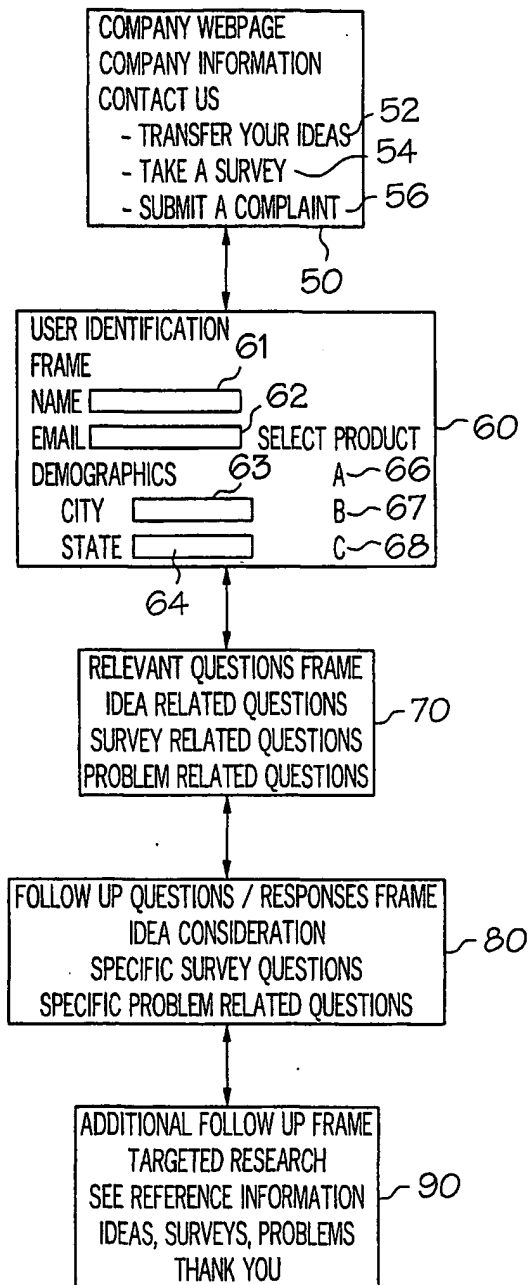


FIG. 2

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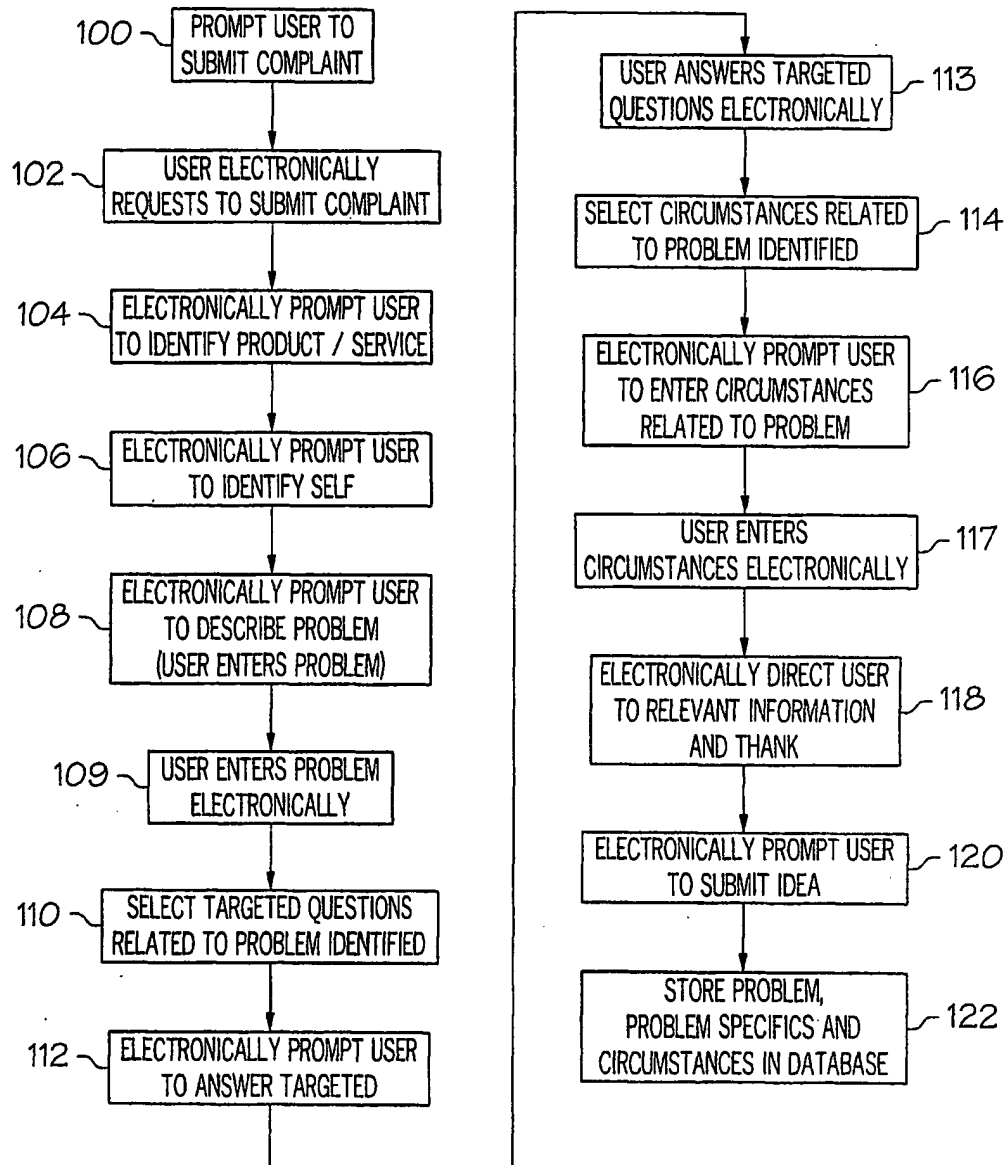


FIG. 3

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IDENTIFY A SPECIFIC PROBLEM

PLEASE PROVIDE US WITH SOME INFORMATION ON YOUR CHILD AND THE SIZE OF
DIAPERS USED:

GENDER: ☐ MALE ☒ FEMALE 140

AGE: 0-3 MONTHS 142

WEIGHT: 5-10 LBS 144

DIAPER SIZE: SIZE 1 (INFANT) 146

WHAT BRAND DID YOU PURCHASE?:

151

A

B

C

☐ BRAND A

☒ BRAND B

☐ BRAND C

HOW MANY DIAPERS WERE IN THE PACKAGE?

6 152

ENTER PACKAGE IDENTIFICATION CODE:

1234567 154

CHOOSE A PROBLEM FROM THE FOLLOWING LIST THAT MOST ACCURATELY DESCRIBES
YOUR EXPERIENCE:

MALFUNCTION OF FASTENING SYSTEM 156

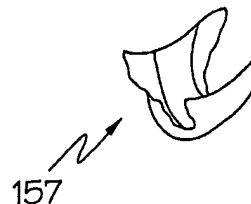
HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THIS PROBLEM?

158

SELECT LOCATION PROBLEM OCCURRED:

WILL THIS PROBLEM AFFECT YOUR PURCHASE DECISION?

WILL BUY JUST AS OFTEN 160



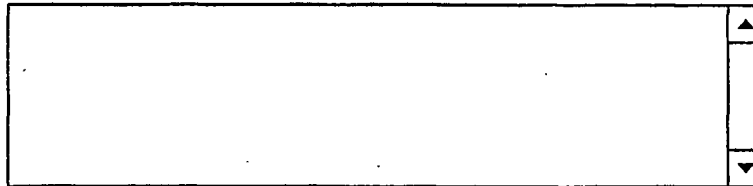
4B ----- 4B

FIG. 4A

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4A-----4A

PLEASE ADD ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION THAT COULD HELP DESCRIBE THE PROBLEM:



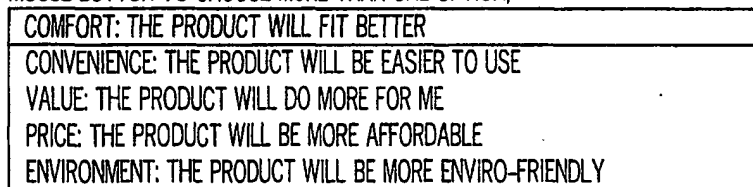
WHAT IMPROVEMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR BRAND A?



WHAT BENEFITS WOULD YOUR IDEA PROVIDE?

CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY (HOLD DOWN THE 'CTRL' KEY WHILE CLICKING ON THE LEFT MOUSE BUTTON TO CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE OPTION)

COMFORT: THE PRODUCT WILL FIT BETTER
CONVENIENCE: THE PRODUCT WILL BE EASIER TO USE
VALUE: THE PRODUCT WILL DO MORE FOR ME
PRICE: THE PRODUCT WILL BE MORE AFFORDABLE
ENVIRONMENT: THE PRODUCT WILL BE MORE ENVIRO-FRIENDLY



SUBMIT YOUR INFORMATION




FIG. 4B

PLEASE PROVIDE SPECIFICS REGARDING THE PROBLEM

SELECT GENERAL PROBLEM
MALFUNCTION OF FASTENING SYSTEM ▾

SELECT GENERAL PROBLEM

TAPE WON'T ADHERE
TAPE WAS OPEN AND STUCK TO BACKSHEET OR LINER
ONE OR MORE TAPES WERE MISSING
TAPE COULD NOT BE OPENED

IDENTIFY CIRCUMSTANCES

HOW MANY TIME WERE TAPES OPENED PRIOR TO NOT ADHERING? 1 2 3 MORE

DID YOU USE ANY OF THESE ON THE BABY WHEN THE TAPE FAILED?
LOTION ☐ POWDER ☐ MEDICATION ☐ OTHER ☐

THANK YOU
CLICK HERE FOR INFORMATION ON HOW TO MAXIMIZE TAPE LIFE

FIG. 5

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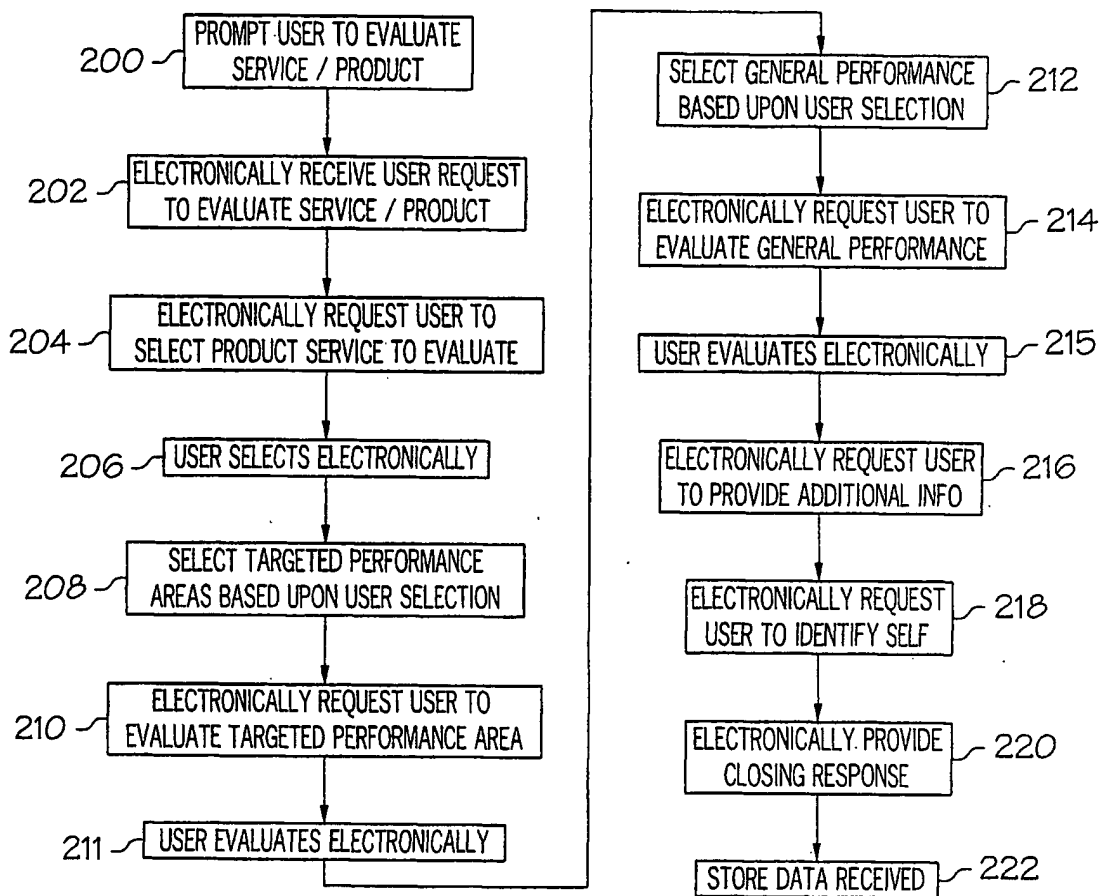


FIG. 6

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RATE YOUR EXPERIENCE

PLEASE PROVIDE US WITH SOME INFORMATION ON YOUR CHILD AND THE SIZE OF DIAPERS USED:

GENDER: ☒ MALE ☐ FEMALE ²³⁰

AGE: ²³²

WEIGHT: ²³⁴

DIAPER SIZE: ²³⁶

WHAT BRAND DID YOU USE?: ²³⁸

WHAT OTHER BRANDS HAVE YOU TRIED IN THE LAST 3 MONTHS?: ²⁴⁰

IF OTHER, SPECIFY: ²⁴²

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANY OF THESE PROBLEMS WITH DIAPERS OVER THE LAST THREE MONTHS? IDENTIFY THE FREQUENCY AND IMPROTANCE OF ANY PROBLEM YOU'VE HAD.

PROBLEM	HOW OFTEN?	HOW IMPORTANT?	HOW OFTEN?	HOW IMPORTANT?
PROBLEM A	<input type="text" value="SOMETIMES"/> ²⁴⁴	<input type="text" value="WILL BUY JUST AS OFTEN"/> ²⁴⁶	<input type="text" value="SOMETIMES"/> ²⁴⁸	<input type="text" value="WILL BUY LESS OFTEN"/> ²⁵⁰
PROBLEM B	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁴	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁶	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁸	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁵⁰
PROBLEM C	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁴	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁶	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁸	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁵⁰
PROBLEM D	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁴	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁶	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁸	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁵⁰
PROBLEM E	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁴	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁶	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁸	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁵⁰
PROBLEM F	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁴	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁶	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁴⁸	<input type="text" value="CHOOSE"/> ²⁵⁰

7B ----- 7B

FIG. 7A

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7A-----7A

252 RATE THE FOLLOWING DIAPERS:

	BRAND A	BRAND B
QUALITY	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>
VALUE	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>
PERFORMANCE	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>
COMFORT	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>
CONVENIENCE	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>
VALUE	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>
ENVIRONMENT	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>
OVERALL	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>	CHOOSE <input type="button" value="v"/>

IF BRAND A IS NOT THE BEST BRAND, WHAT MAKES OTHER BRAND BETTER?

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR

WHAT BENEFITS WOULD YOUR IDEA PROVIDE?

CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY (HOLD DOWN THE 'CTRL' KEY WHILE CLICKING ON THE LEFT MOUSE BUTTON TO CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE OPTION)

☐ COMFORT: THE PRODUCT WILL FIT BETTER
☐ CONVENIENCE: THE PRODUCT WILL BE EASIER TO USE
☐ VALUE: THE PRODUCT WILL DO MORE FOR ME
☐ PRICE: THE PRODUCT WILL BE MORE AFFORDABLE
☐ ENVIRONMENT: THE PRODUCT WILL BE MORE ENVIRO-FRIENDLY

RATE YOUR EXPERIENCE

FIG. 7B

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RETAILER SURVEY

RATE YOUR EXPERIENCE

PLEASE IDENTIFY IF YOU WORK FOR ANY OF THE FOLLOWING MAJOR RETAILERS:

COMPANY A	▲
COMPANY B	
COMPANY C	
COMPANY D	▼

270

IF YOUR COMPANY DOES NOT APPEAR ABOVE, PLEASE SPECIFY:

--

272

PLEASE TELL US WHERE YOUR STORE IS:

COUNTRY:

UNITED STATES	▼
---------------	---

274

STATE / PROVINCE:

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	▼
----------------------	---

275

CITY / TOWN:

WASHINGTON	▼
------------	---

275

WHAT IS YOUR POSITION?

☒ MANAGER

☐ ASSISTANT MANAGER

☐ CLERK

OTHER:

--

278

ARE YOU INVOLVED WITH THE ORDERING AND BILLING OF GOODS?

☒ YES

☐ NO

282

PLEASE RATE COMPANY Z PERFORMANCE IN THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES, AND WHERE WE ARE NOT 'BEST IN CLASS,' IDENTIFY WHO IS:

	RANK COMPANY Z	BEST IN CLASS (IF NOT Z)				
COMMUNICATION	<table border="1"><tr><td>BEST IN CLASS</td><td>▼</td></tr></table>	BEST IN CLASS	▼	<table border="1"><tr><td>CHOOSE</td><td>▼</td></tr></table>	CHOOSE	▼
BEST IN CLASS	▼					
CHOOSE	▼					
ORDERING	<table border="1"><tr><td>ABOVE AVERAGE</td><td>▼</td></tr></table>	ABOVE AVERAGE	▼	<table border="1"><tr><td>COMPANY X</td><td>▼</td></tr></table>	COMPANY X	▼
ABOVE AVERAGE	▼					
COMPANY X	▼					
DELIVERY	<table border="1"><tr><td>AVERAGE</td><td>▼</td></tr></table>	AVERAGE	▼	<table border="1"><tr><td>COMPANY Y</td><td>▼</td></tr></table>	COMPANY Y	▼
AVERAGE	▼					
COMPANY Y	▼					
RECEIVING	<table border="1"><tr><td>BEST IN CLASS</td><td>▼</td></tr></table>	BEST IN CLASS	▼	<table border="1"><tr><td>CHOOSE</td><td>▼</td></tr></table>	CHOOSE	▼
BEST IN CLASS	▼					
CHOOSE	▼					
STOCKING	<table border="1"><tr><td>BEST IN CLASS</td><td>▼</td></tr></table>	BEST IN CLASS	▼	<table border="1"><tr><td>CHOOSE</td><td>▼</td></tr></table>	CHOOSE	▼
BEST IN CLASS	▼					
CHOOSE	▼					
BILLING	<table border="1"><tr><td>BEST IN CLASS</td><td>▼</td></tr></table>	BEST IN CLASS	▼	<table border="1"><tr><td>CHOOSE</td><td>▼</td></tr></table>	CHOOSE	▼
BEST IN CLASS	▼					
CHOOSE	▼					
PROMOTION	<table border="1"><tr><td>ABOVE AVERAGE</td><td>▼</td></tr></table>	ABOVE AVERAGE	▼	<table border="1"><tr><td>COMPANY V</td><td>▼</td></tr></table>	COMPANY V	▼
ABOVE AVERAGE	▼					
COMPANY V	▼					

284

286

280

8B

8B

FIG. 8A

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8A

IN STORE SERVICE	BELOW AVERAGE ▼	COMPANY W ▼
SPECIAL DISPLAYS	AVERAGE ▼	COMPANY X ▼
CONSUMER SATISFACTION	BEST IN CLASS ▼	CHOOSE ▼
PRODUCT & PACKAGE QUALITY	BEST IN CLASS ▼	CHOOSE ▼
RETURNING	BEST IN CLASS ▼	CHOOSE ▼
OVERALL RETAILER SATISFACTION	ABOVE AVERAGE ▼	CAMPANY V ▼

286

284

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR

288

RATE YOUR EXPERIENCE 289

FIG. 8B

IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS

PLEASE MAKE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING CHOICES:

MY IDEA IS CONFIDENTIAL, HAS BEEN PATENTED, OR I PLAN TO PATENT MY IDEA.
GO TO TECHNOLOGY ACQUISITION CENTER.

I WANT TO GIVE MY IDEA TO PROCTER AND GAMBLE.
GIVE YOUR IDEA.

332

FIG. 10

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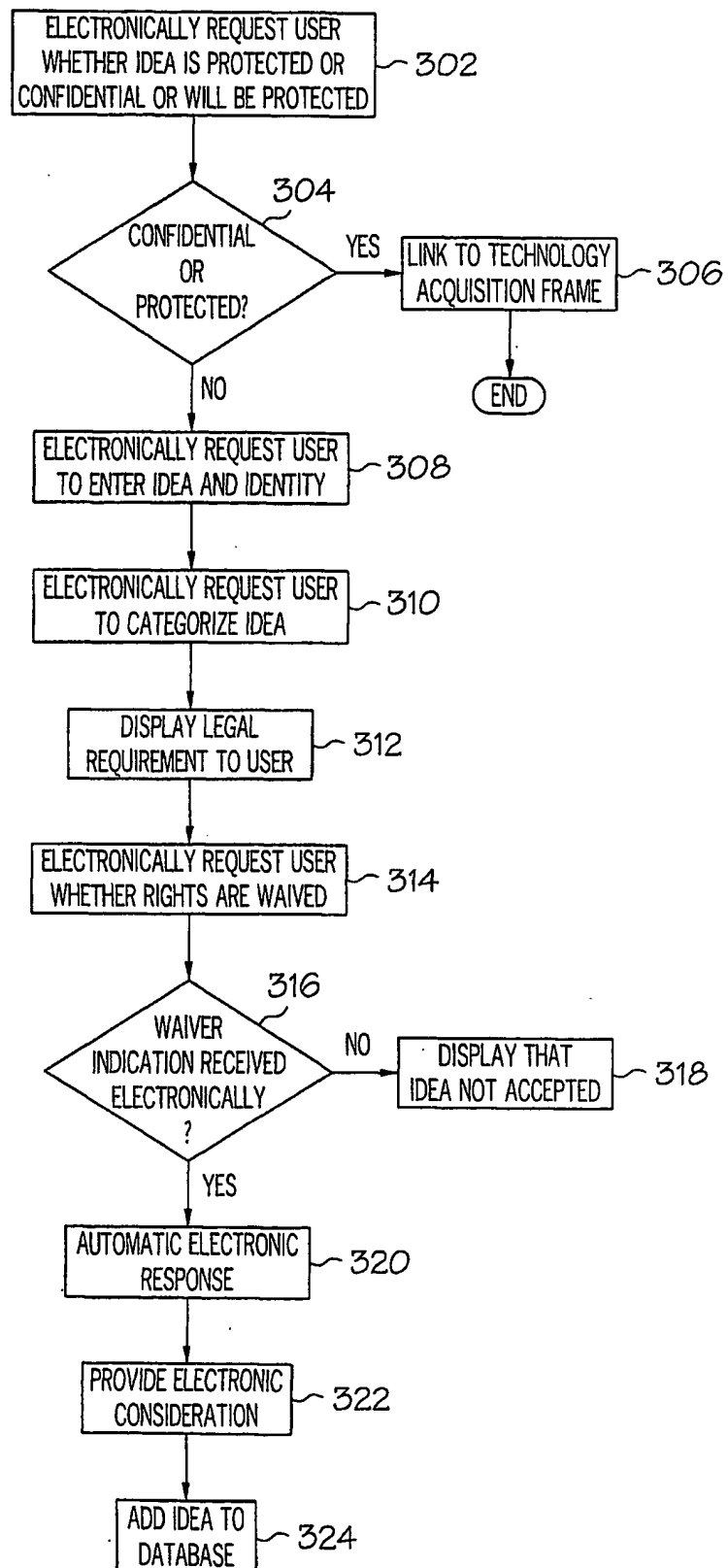


FIG. 9

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*IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS*IDEA SUBMISSION FORM

I AM SUBMITTING TO YOU AN IDEA HAVING TO DO WITH THE IMPROVEMENT OF AN EXISTING PRODUCT, OR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW PRODUCT.

IN DOING SO, I AGREE TO THE CONDITIONS OUTLINED ON THE WAIVER OF RIGHTS AND FURTHER AGREE THAT THESE CONDITIONS APPLY BROADLY TO COMPANY Z AND ALL OF ITS SUBSIDIARY AND AFFILIATED COMPANIES.

ENTER A TITLE FOR YOUR IDEA:

 336

DESCRIBE YOUR IDEA IN DETAIL:

 338

WHAT BENEFITS WOULD YOUR IDEA PROVIDE?

CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY (HOLD DOWN THE 'CTRL' KEY WHILE CLICKING ON THE LEFT MOUSE BUTTON TO CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE OPTION)

COMFORT: THE PRODUCT WILL FIT BETTER
 CONVENIENCE: THE PRODUCT WILL BE EASIER TO USE
 VALUE: THE PRODUCT WILL DO MORE FOR ME
 PRICE: THE PRODUCT WILL BE MORE AFFORDABLE
 ENVIRONMENT: THE PRODUCT WILL BE MORE ENVIRO-FRIENDLY

 340

IN ADDITION TO PRODUCT A WOULD YOUR IDEA BENEFIT ANY OTHER

PRODUCT? IF SO SELECT THOSE IT WOULD BENEFIT:

CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY (HOLD DOWN THE 'CTRL' KEY WHILE CLICKING ON THE LEFT MOUSE BUTTON TO CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE OPTION)

COMPANY A
 COMPANY B
 COMPANY C
 COMPANY D

 342

11B ----- 11B

FIG. 11A

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11A ----- 11A

I HAVE READ THE PRIVACY STATEMENT AND LEGAL POLICY.

I UNDERSTAND YOUR POLICY STATEMENT SET FORTH ABOVE AND ACCEPT THE CONDITIONS WITHOUT RESERVATION. I AM DISCLOSING MY IDEA VOLUNTARILY ON A NON-CONFIDENTIAL BASIS AND AGREE THAT THERE IS TO BE NO CONFIDENTIAL RELATIONSHIP WHATEVER ESTABLISHED IN CONNECTION WITH MY SUBMISSION OR YOUR EVALUATION OF THE IDEA.

PLEASE TYPE IN YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS INFORMATION:

NAME:

COMPANY:

ADDRESS:

CITY:

PROV/STATE: POSTAL/ZIP:

COUNTRY:

PHONE:

FACSIMILE:

EMAIL:

344

PLEASE TYPE IN YOUR BIRTHDATE:

BY SELECTING THE 'ACCEPT' BUTTON, BELOW, YOU CERTIFY THE FOLLOWING CHECKED ITEMS ARE TRUE, AND THIS SELECTION SHALL CONSTITUTE A SIGNATURE AUTHENTICATING YOUR ACCEPTANCE OF THIS WRITING AS A BINDING CONTRACT. 351

- 350 ☐ I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE WAIVER OF RIGHTS (CLICK TO VIEW). 351
- 352 ☐ I AGREE TO BE BOUND BY THE TERMS OF THE WAIVER OF RIGHTS (CLICK TO VIEW). 351
- 354 ☐ I WAIVE ALL RIGHTS TO THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE, INCLUDING MY SUGGESTION, AND DEDICATE IT TO

SUBMIT YOUR IDEA

356 358

NO, I HAVE RECONSIDERED. GO TO TECHNOLOGY ACQUISITION CENTER

FIG. 11B

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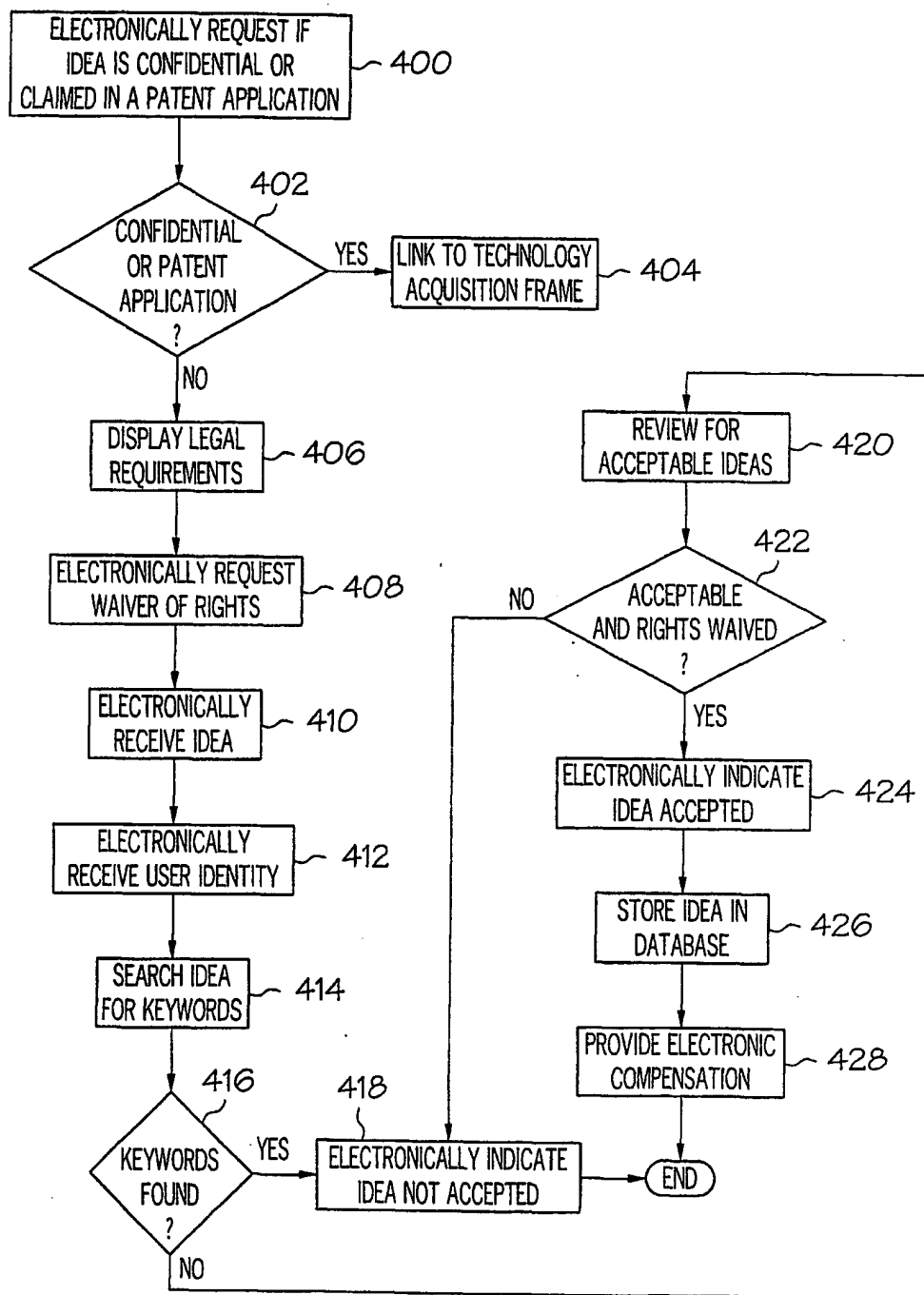


FIG. 12

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AGREEMENT WAIVER OF RIGHTS TO IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS

BEFORE SUBMITTING YOUR IDEAS OR SUGGESTIONS, PLEASE READ THROUGH THIS AGREEMENT TO UNDERSTAND WHAT RIGHTS YOU GIVE UP AND WAIVE IN PROVIDING US WITH YOUR SUBMISSION(S). IF YOU HAVE A PATENTED IDEA OR AN IDEA COVERED BY A PENDING PATENT APPLICATION, PLEASE ENTER OUR TECHNOLOGY ACQUISITION CENTER FOR SEPARATE INSTRUCTIONS.

IN SUBMITTING YOUR IDEA(S) OR SUGGESTION(S) TO US, YOU AGREE TO EACH OF THE CONDITIONS POSTED BELOW AND FURTHER AGREE THAT EACH OF THESE CONDITIONS APPLY FOREVER AND BROADLY WITH REGARD TO COMPANY A AND EACH OF ITS SUBSIDIARIES AND AFFILIATES (COLLECTIVELY, COMPANY), WORLDWIDE.

- (1) ALL SUBMISSIONS OR DISCLOSURES OF IDEAS ARE VOLUNTARY ON YOUR PART AND NO CONFIDENTIAL OR CONTRACTUAL RELATIONSHIP IS ESTABLISHED BY YOUR SUBMISSION OR TO BE IMPLIED BY OUR REVIEW AND/OR SUBSEQUENT USE OF YOUR SUBMITTED MATERIAL.
- (2) COMPANY SHALL NOT BE LIABLE FOR ANY DISCLOSURE OF ANY IDEA(S) OR SUGGESTION(S) YOU SUBMIT. LIKEWISE, YOU AGREE COMPANY SHALL NOT BE OBLIGATED TO USE OR DISCLOSE ANY IDEAS OR SUGGESTIONS YOU SUBMIT, FOR COMMERCIAL PURPOSES OR OTHERWISE.
- (3) YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NOT RECEIVED THIS IDEA FROM ANOTHER PERSON AND YOU ARE FREE TO SUBMIT IT TO US.
- (4) IDEAS AND/OR SUGGESTIONS YOU SUBMIT WHICH YOU HAVE NOT PREVIOUSLY COVERED BY A PATENT OR PENDING PATENT APPLICATION WILL BE DEEMED AND SHALL REMAIN SOLE PROPERTY OF COMPANY, COMPANY SHALL EXCLUSIVELY OWN ALL NOW KNOWN AND FUTURE EXISTING RIGHTS TO ANY SUBMISSIONS YOU MAKE, OF ANY KIND OR NATURE.
- (5) COMPANY SHALL BE ENTITLED TO UNRESTRICTED USE OF ANY SUBMISSIONS IT MAY RECEIVE FROM YOU, FOR ANY PURPOSE WHATSOEVER, COMMERCIAL OR OTHERWISE, WITHOUT COMPENSATION TO YOU AS PROVIDER OF THE SUBMISSION.
- (6) ONCE YOU HAVE ACCEPTED THE FOREGOING CONDITIONS, THEY ARE NOT SUBJECT TO WAIVER OR ADDITIONAL CHANGES. YOU HAVE ENTERED NO OTHER UNDERSTANDINGS AND/OR AGREEMENTS WITH COMPANY REGARDING THE SUBMISSION OF THESE IDEA(S) AND/OR SUGGESTION(S).

PLEASE READ AND THEN CHECK EACH OF THE BOXES WHICH APPLY BELOW:

- ☐ I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE WAIVER OF RIGHTS TO IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS
- ☐ I AGREE TO BE BOUND BY THE TERMS OF THE WAIVER OF RIGHTS TO IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS

IF YOU HAVE CHECKED BOTH BOXES ABOVE, YOU AGREE THAT WITH RESPECT TO ANY IDEAS OR SUBMISSIONS YOU SEND TO THIS WEBSITE, YOU FOREVER WAIVE ALL CLAIMS OF OWNERSHIP AND CONFIDENTIALITY. ALL SUBMISSIONS BELONG TO COMPANY. DO YOU AGREE?

☐ I AGREE

☐ I DO NOT AGREE

SUBMIT IDEA

FIG. 13

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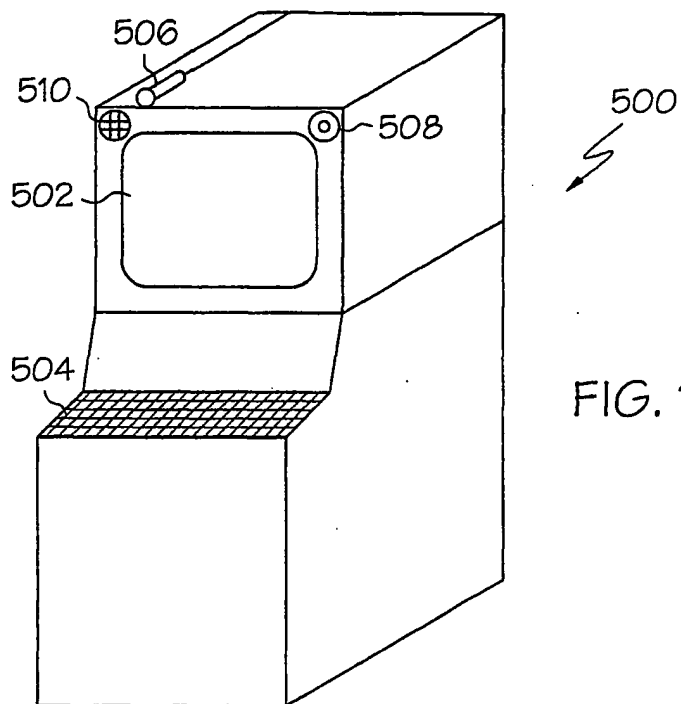


FIG. 14A

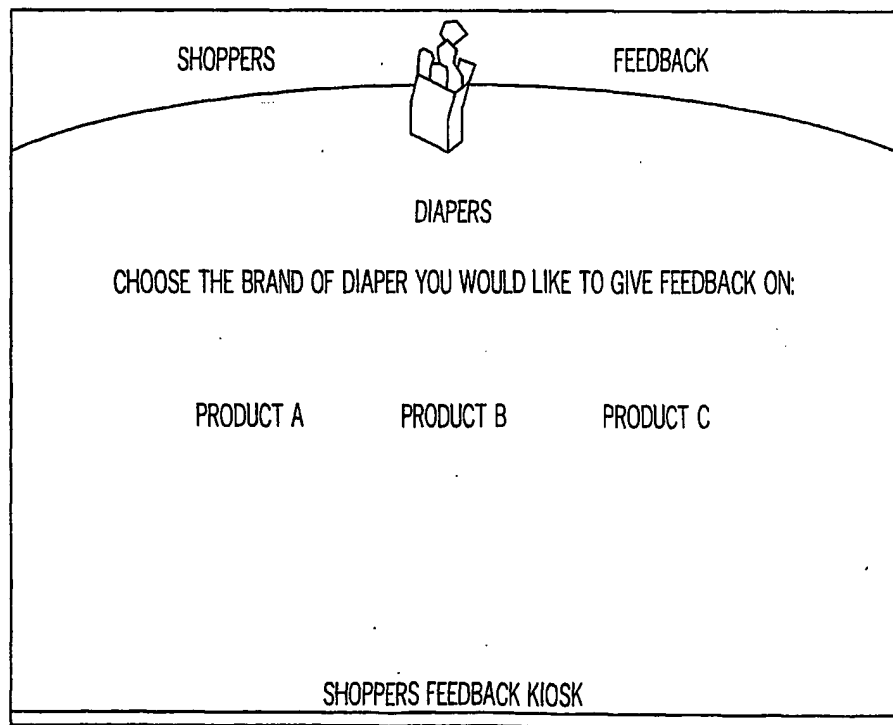


FIG. 14B

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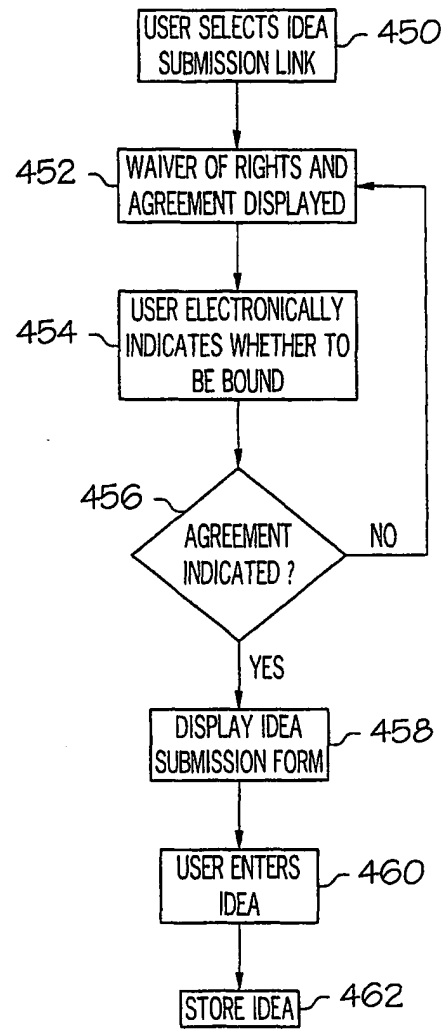


FIG. 15

PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

PCT

DECLARATION OF NON-ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

(PCT Article 17(2)(a), Rules 13ter.1(c) and Rule 39)

Applicant's or agent's file reference 8140/JB	IMPORTANT DECLARATION	Date of mailing(day/month/year) 25/09/2001
International application No. PCT/US 01/ 20754	International filing date(day/month/year) 28/06/2001	(Earliest) Priority date(day/month/year) 30/06/2000
International Patent Classification (IPC) or both national classification and IPC G05F17/60		
Applicant THE PROCTER & GAMBLE COMPANY		

This International Searching Authority hereby declares, according to Article 17(2)(a), that **no international search report will be established** on the international application for the reasons indicated below

1. ☒ The subject matter of the international application relates to:
 - a. ☐ scientific theories.
 - b. ☐ mathematical theories
 - c. ☐ plant varieties.
 - d. ☐ animal varieties.
 - e. ☐ essentially biological processes for the production of plants and animals, other than microbiological processes and the products of such processes.
 - f. ☒ schemes, rules or methods of doing business.
 - g. ☐ schemes, rules or methods of performing purely mental acts.
 - h. ☐ schemes, rules or methods of playing games.
 - i. ☐ methods for treatment of the human body by surgery or therapy.
 - j. ☐ methods for treatment of the animal body by surgery or therapy.
 - k. ☐ diagnostic methods practised on the human or animal body.
 - l. ☐ mere presentations of information.
 - m. ☐ computer programs for which this International Searching Authority is not equipped to search prior art.

2. ☐ The failure of the following parts of the international application to comply with prescribed requirements prevents a meaningful search from being carried out:


☐ the description
☐ the claims
☐ the drawings

3. ☐ The failure of the nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence listing to comply with the standard provided for in Annex C of the Administrative Instructions prevents a meaningful search from being carried out:

☐ the written form has not been furnished or does not comply with the standard.

☐ the computer readable form has not been furnished or does not comply with the standard.

4. Further comments:

Name and mailing address of the International Searching Authority  European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL-2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Authorized officer María Rodríguez Nóvoa
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FURTHER INFORMATION CONTINUED FROM PCT/ISA/ 203

The subject-matter claimed in claims 1, 2 and 5-10 falls under the provisions of Article 17(2)(a)(i) and Rule 39.1(iii) PCT, such subject-matter relating to a method of doing business.

Claims 3 and 4 relate to commonplace technological features for performing the business method of the method claims. Although these claims do not literally belong to the method category, they essentially claim protection for the same commercial effect as the method claims. With reference to the Guidelines, B-VIII, points 1-6, the International Searching Authority considers that searching such commercial features would serve no useful purpose. This applies to the remaining commonplace technological features of these claims as well.

The applicant's attention is drawn to the fact that claims relating to inventions in respect of which no international search report has been established need not be the subject of an international preliminary examination (Rule 66.1(e) PCT). The applicant is advised that the EPO policy when acting as an International Preliminary Examining Authority is normally not to carry out a preliminary examination on matter which has not been searched. This is the case irrespective of whether or not the claims are amended following receipt of the search report or during any Chapter II procedure. If the application proceeds into the regional phase before the EPO, the applicant is reminded that a search may be carried out during examination before the EPO (see EPO Guideline C-VI, 8.5), should the problems which led to the Article 17(2) declaration be overcome.